



4-2020

## Buried Hair

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BURIED HAIR  
BY: ABBY RADCLIFFE

DON'T BOTHER THE EARTH SPIRIT WHO LIVES HERE. SHE IS WORKING ON A STORY.  
-JOY HARJO, "DON'T BOTHER THE EARTH SPIRIT"

MY EYES,  
THEY CANNOT SEE THE SKY.  
IS THIS THE PRICE  
FOR HAVING LEARNED HOW NOT TO CRY?  
- JACKSON BROWNE, "DOCTOR MY EYES"

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNMOLTING	3
BAGGAGE	5
GRANDAD OF CHRIST	7
CHAMPAGNE BLUE	8
THE GOLF COURSE IS VACANT	9
“WHAT DOES POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION MEAN FOR THE KID?”	10
I NEVER FELT HATE	11
IT’S NOT THE MAZE THAT WE GET LOST IN (STUPID PIGS)	12
MY SISTER IS AN ANARCHIST.	13
SESTINA FOR GIRLHOOD	14
GREY MEMORIES	16
CHICAGO: THE PULSE LINE	18
BLOB TREE	19
FLOWERS INSTEAD	21
TO UPSET TIME	22
EULOGENICS	23
HOW TO TELL THE GOOD TIMES	24
ASTORIA WILL FALL	26
WHAT’S HAPPENED HERE?	27
HAUNTED PLACE	29
A CRITICAL ANGLE	32
SIGNIFICANT DRUNK JUNCTURES	33
ON THIS BEAUTIFUL DAY WITH YOUR BEAUTIFUL DAD	34
BLACKBERRY NIGHTS	35
IT’S NOT THE MAZE THAT WE GET LOST IN (PINEAPPLE FRUIT)	36
THINGS GROW UP AND OUT	37
FOR JULIANITA, AT THE IMA	38
HELLO JOSEPH,	39
“WHAT DOES POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION MEAN FOR THE KID?”	41
THE HEART BLEEDS SOMETHING LIKE NAILS	42
AND PERHAPS WITHOUT JFK	44
TEENAGERS IN INDIAN COUNTRY	45
GOOD BROWS	46
A SOVEREIGN MAN	48
THE TRIBE HE CARRIES	49
GREEN CARD INTERVIEW	50
“WHAT DOES POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION MEAN FOR THE KID?”	51
WASHING MACHINE	52
BURIED HAIR	53

## **Unmolting**

Fallen leaves, to their branches,  
shed feathers, to the chicken,  
deflect raindrops into the sky,  
braid loose hairs into their heads,  
the berries, back to their veneers,  
minutes, back to their hours,  
swamp water, back to the eyes.

I paper mache all holes shut.

I paper mache all holes shut.

ALL OF THESE OTHER MOTHERS HAD TO DIE FOR ME TO REALIZE I'D NEVER HAVE ONE.

## Baggage

36,000 feet in the air,  
probably somewhere above Otero County, Colorado.

I sit in 19E.  
19D says, “You write, huh?”

gesturing toward the worn notebook in my lap.  
“I guess,” I say,

Imagining that 19D was an eyeless figure  
in an Edward Hopper painting.

“What about?” asks 19D.

*Mostly about how old buildings are destroyed  
before anyone can properly love them*

*and cracks in walls that spill muted memories  
and flakes of grey plaster—*

*the stuff that actually comes out of the walls, behind chipped paint.  
I write about my little brother’s laugh*

*and how old ladies are always wearing  
rings too big for their fingers.*

*Sometimes about the endearing quality of wobbly school tables—  
when one of the legs is slightly shorter than the rest.*

*I try not to write about ethical consumption  
because it kills me.*

*Once I saw a bumper sticker  
on the back of a ’95 Suzuki Samurai: “Meat is Murder!”*

*But people are killing people  
in Central America over avocados and bananas.*

*People kill me.*

The airplane breaches a patch of clouds.

My carryon shifts overhead

and I realize that I must be sitting beside  
a poem with legs.



## **Grandad of Christ**

Stars hang, unfolded.  
Half strung-up by paperclips.

Two years in a row I was chosen  
to play Mary, 9 and 10 year-old mother  
of Christ. Mary had no lines  
in the pageant and was only  
meant to clutch a plastic Jesus.

I didn't speak much but I wanted lines.

Everything gold and green.  
Real god and all his makings.

After thinking on it, all that Mary could have done  
during the play was push a plastic  
Messiah from her vagina, and then what?  
Put him in the the thing horses feed from?

Blood is all. All her clean blood.

Bleachers jut forward, velvet curtains furled.

My nails were painted sparkly blue  
and I wasn't thinking about my divine virginity.  
I wished I was eating a slice  
of Junior's carrot cake with my dad.  
Even just there, in the third row,  
to the left.

Inside my body,  
I recalled the sunbled stream  
and I didn't care if Jesus was ever within me.

Plus I'm pretty sure my dad is happy  
that I am not the actual mother of god because  
that would make him the granddad of god  
and I think even then, he'd still just believe in me.

## Champagne Blue

The home sits like a bridge  
between Oconaluftee and America, america—  
ashes and hyacinth.  
Of course not tipi, not adequately contracted either.  
A stone blue front door hangs on its hinges,  
always slightly open, the way a bookmark  
holds a book a little open.  
The ghosts of autumn hide in every dark crevice,  
but there are no trees for the leaves to fall from—  
no trees here.  
The dust of the place means we're alive,  
means we're taking  
care of the place as much as any family ahead of us did.  
In the single bathroom, a vintage shower tap  
cranes over a porcelain, seashell sink  
stained brown and brown and brown.  
The water that runs smells brown.  
When someone showers, the bathroom  
swells with lavender soap steam and the water's  
sulfuric stench.  
Always more sulfur than sacred lavender.  
In the parlor, there used to be an ashtray.  
Cigarette butts lie smeared, emptied  
on a faded oriental rug. On the oak  
coffee table, sits a tin coffee can  
brimming with dead  
and dry hyacinth—  
flowers I once mistook for lilacs when  
they were alive.  
When flowers were more than fossils.  
I remember the smell though.  
This place will be always more ash than hyacinth.

## **The Golf Course is Vacant**

Except for us.

As a kid, I'm walking with my baby brother, Mikey. I remember his pale blond hair radiating our mother. His eyes were like canteens in that they were full and taking away thirst, and not the other way round. And he's a genuine little boy. On his fourth birthday, we asked Mikey his favorite animal and he said "Land or sea? Overall, it's the sperm whale" but he couldn't pronounce his r's. And by a pond in the empty golf course we found a small painted turtle that he called "Puppy" but not even because he wanted a puppy.

So let's say that my brother is my son and although I didn't house him in my guts, I have made a home for him so big within me that there isn't even a teenaged girl walking by her brother in a vacant golf course. It's just her brother. Wait, he's not a brother if it's just him, if I'm not there.

**“What does postpartum depression mean for the kid?”**

Is a question I'll never have to ask,  
is a question I can't imagine my mother asked.  
Every time I am likened to her, I feel a yanking  
at the place where we were once attached  
and it's her trying to sever the cord.

I know this because when I was a part of her,  
she hated it.

I know this because now that I am a part from her,  
she hates it—

that we were ever of the same.

Same eyes, same nose, same chin.

She's beautiful, but she didn't  
want me and I don't want to look like her  
because she's beautiful.

    If beauty lives, when does it rest and where? For how long  
will my father's skin bear less burden than  
the tragedy of resemblance?

If I could have sank my need in her  
blood, in our blood, proved what a mother could be,  
maybe I'd know whether I could ever be one.

Maybe I wouldn't be afraid of other things that could be mothers.

    Supposing beauty lives, where does the lineage end?  
Oh, how she would cry if she ever read this.

## **I never felt hate**

Until I wanted to hate,  
the whole day was clarion; outside, in.  
The grass could have been green on two sides  
and the sun was pulsing down in the troposphere.  
Not in a greenhouse-effect-kind-of-way,  
but the sun was actually stuck  
to our tongues and just above our heads.  
Squeezing through teeth like it does through trees.  
My brother and I skateboarded—  
rolled over fields, under hills.  
I had my first hangover,  
was wearing my Dad's Italy National soccer jersey  
—he said my clothes smelled like a public restroom.  
Had to keep yanking my long hair out of my face.  
Bruises really come before the crashing—  
just lying down, thinking.  
I once wrote about vibrations in the walls  
which sounded like a great line of poetry  
until my walls started vibrating and I couldn't get to sleep.  
Now I never sleep.  
I hear people say reparations like we've gotten any.  
People say vibrations like they've taken everything  
and are breaking through my bedroom walls.  
My brother and I skateboarded.

## **It's Not the Maze that We Get Lost In (Stupid Pigs)**

A maze is a unicursal walking path,  
not originally intended to disorient its participants/ never  
a thing meant for solving or not solving.  
There were never supposed to be any unexpected dead ends.  
If there are between three and six billion yew trees on  
earth, aren't we always treading beneath the stuff of mazes?  
They say its easy to get lost in Venice— try getting lost  
in the labyrinth of Villa Pisani. The most difficult there is to solve/ not solve,  
with 9 concentric rings and walls too tall for looking over.  
The hedge starts at head height and begins to rise  
as a watchman shouts directions from a middle-positioned turret.  
He sees that God did not have to pick up his pen with this one.  
Athena swells from the turret and laughs at the stupid pigs.  
And we're all stupid pigs rooting around for our center.

**My sister is an anarchist.**

On her distressed jean jacket,  
a bright pink pin reads:  
“Vicious Power-Hungry Bitch.”

She is.  
But you can always see  
the clouds in her sunglasses,  
and walking along the High Line in Manhattan  
she looks like she must have just ripped the flowers  
from her hair.

## Sestina for Girlhood

Sunlight in the shape of dead leaves  
dances across my torn up, flat-bottomed, tennis shoes.  
Next to me is the best friend that I had ever had  
and she's talking about her vagina.  
I don't listen but I pretend to because she's experienced  
and I am not. And I don't care. It gives and gives, the sun.

She gives and she gives like the sun.  
Stenciled and splayed to my movements: the dead leaves.  
My friend, she thinks she's a whore. She's experienced.  
Dozens of trees burning; the embers find themselves under my tennis shoes.  
Losing everything else and her glorious femininity—  
It breaks as she continues to be the best friend that I had ever had.

Sometimes running alone, was the only freedom that I had ever had  
When my skin was freshly marked, red, by the sun.  
I'm doing what I love in my home. Should I fear for my safety?  
The honks, themselves seem to rustle up the dead leaves  
and my cadence quickens. I pick up my trail-running tennis shoes  
as if to stomp out all of what's wrong with this world. In this, *I am* experienced.

My little sisters, beautiful sisters. Are they experienced?  
Cold are the mouths of the girls, filling with autumn inhales: the best friends I had ever had.  
I kick up the sand. Yells. He tells me to take off my tennis shoes.  
My tears pool up and harshly reflect the sun.  
And in, through the vacuum of our front door, rush those damned dead leaves.  
And out, rushes girlhood, a failed innocence.

My girl arms struggle to bolster the unwavering heaviness of beauty.  
Holding that door is the least that can be done. Do you want this experience?  
In the dying light of my last October, I fell into a pile of dead leaves.  
Something more harsh than sunbeams to break my heart. Love never had.  
It knows no limit as to what is only its own: the sun.  
Racing backward, I wear down my tennis shoes.

So to remain myself, I wear these old, flat-bottomed tennis shoes  
and to keep from feeling, I don't speak to my emotions.  
My skin, red. Not burnt by the sun  
warrants some of my limited experience.  
What I know about being a woman, I learned from men and the best friend I had ever had.  
We lived her experience and kicked up the dead leaves.



My patience is dead leaves falling. Getting stuck under my flat-bottomed tennis shoes.  
The best friend I had ever had is still talking about her vagina.  
I try to listen, because she has experience. She gives and gives like the sun.

## Grey Memories

I don't tolerate people who romanticize their childhoods,  
like their elementary years were painted into one  
of the greyish landscapes of a Gustave Courbet piece.  
Living as you'd expect colors to, branches of small  
hours' trees lying heavy with a false hue.

My childhood was shit but I had a beautiful sister.  
She commanded that every place she walk be clean.  
Endless sage, burning. Her Cherokee cheekbones  
inspire the same peace invoked by the Oconaluftee  
River. She's got a beautiful heart that holds misery  
in both of its hands— bobs and breaks the surface of the icy water  
until it sees land.

She was always like this.

But we had this friend— distantly related.  
She romanticized her childhood in a way that it perpetually  
repeated itself. Through a screened back door,  
we watched her get torn through. Watched her spread  
from girl, unentered to open. And retract.

We watched her dance downtown on 2 am sidewalks.  
Drunkenly clutching at marble  
statues and wearing my dresses.  
Nothing clean, no sage scent, no Oconaluftee.  
None of it.

She wasn't my sister, but her childhood appears  
in the dark markings behind The Desperate Man.

I THINK PEOPLE WRITE EATING DISORDER MEMOIRS SO THEY CAN TALK ABOUT ALL THE  
NUMBERS THEY WANT.

## Chicago: The Pulse Line

Duneland safety gate  
opens to an Indian Boundary sublime.  
South Shore Line leaks into the city,  
vomits its passengers into a giant hole  
beneath a tight cluster of Art Deco buildings.  
They stretch and graze  
the lower parts of an unknown heaven.

I am a lamb in the city,  
a body without a name.  
Temples stand on each corner  
of every block and every space that falls  
between, cater to a religion of people.  
A religion no church has ever devised;  
prayers spilling onto the sidewalk.

In a world where pedestrians play dumb,  
pigeons are the poets.  
They spin an urban gospel —  
a dirty parable stamped onto a colorless sky.  
Rock salt in the sidewalk cracks  
stirs under the steps of each wandering, city disciple.  
And I can't be moved by any of it.

## **Blob Tree**

My therapist says, *Look at this tree. Are you hanging from it, are you hanging on to it? Where in the tree do you see yourself?*

Skin is a blood dam.  
Sometimes it feels so unnatural.

My ex boyfriend told me that he wanted to try Acid,  
but this girl he was seeing fucked some other guy while on Acid  
and I better not even think about doing any drugs he hasn't done.

Obsessed with my hot little sister and dark films made by predator men.

*Oh. Was he a violent man? Where do you see him on the tree?*

In a way, I can't reclaim myself. Like a washing machine belly,  
white load, spilling out a bundle of clothes,

threatened since birds' birth. Dark pile, one black sock  
turned the whole of me blue: darkest indigo.  
I feel the blue in my belly still.

*So the tree. Where on the tree do you see yourself sitting?*

I guess that's complicated because my best friend  
told me she wished I knew what it was like to be trespassed against  
and she didn't know I...

the tree I guess is always in the back of my mind.  
like a grey landscape memorialized on the far wall of my skull. I  
don't know where I am because it's more like,

**I'm a cat (not a blob)**  
stuck too far up.

When I'm so sad, I clutch hot tin mugs  
filled with the stuff my dad calls life  
water and we've got suede tassels tied to them with beads of colors that mean  
different things and feathers

of birds who don't fly anymore.

*So the tree. Do you have enough strength to climb a tree in real life?*

I don't see how that's pertinent.

## Flowers Instead

Each afternoon, we sank into leather  
chairs and the leather chairs were stiffened  
by the sun. We sit on what's stiffened by the sun  
day in and day out. Not allowed to walk  
far. Watched for every bouncing second.  
I press a stiff blanket up under my nose and breath  
my own fevered air into this angular cocoon  
of bones and the kind of bloat that comes  
from not eating for a few full days. I hide  
my lips, always purple. I hide my lips.

I didn't want to, but cried when made  
to eat anything at all and on my rides home  
I would fight for consciousness and fight someone  
about what I would or would not be eating  
for dinner "ever again!" Do you think  
I'm not a minor anymore. Am I sure? Yes,  
surely— I cant say it... everyone i love

they'll call my parents?  
everyone I love will..  
will be okay  
if I just don't eat.

do you get that?  
I drink the same roast of coffee all day long  
because if not my dad will...  
I read every TV show description all the way  
through before picking a show & most times  
I don't get that far and most times I don't watch  
any TV and most times I am scrubbing at  
the grout lines and most times I am counting  
until I get to the right number and most  
times I don't  
stop.

Later, the doctor told us to draw a garden  
because the flowers would soon take over.  
When we stopped filling our minds with the wrong thoughts,  
flowers would bloom in their place.

## To Upset Time

I can hear you breathing in this picture.  
Your white teeth like coffee canvas  
and your black hair— still black—  
though ocean's waves tumbled and crashed  
on your shoulders, preferring something green.  
Pale hands hold rings too big  
and weak wrists bend near your smile,  
but your eyes are fixed on the corner.

Your body was a tree and wild  
chickens danced around it.

But the tree lessened with time  
in a parade of subtle, dry illness.  
I clutch a chicken to my chest,  
its unfurled feathers stop the time you spent dying.  
But when wings explode like loaded guns of tiny bones,  
I drop the chicken at your feet.  
Try to remember your face now.

Your embraces tasted like coal and like honeysuckle  
and like life has a life itself.

You smoked:  
Fire bled and then bleached,  
breathed until the feet of all things put it out.  
Fire bent, broke, and into your lungs floated black specks.  
Your face, though bloated and crinkled,  
transformed from life to more full life.  
A richness only broken by your breath.  
At the funeral, your name retreated from old to young.

I think I saw the earth spin on its axis,  
and then the life of all things left one last time.



## Eulogenics

I started going to parties when I decided that I was old enough to drink. It wasn't about the drinking because it never was about the drinking and all about being seen by people who didn't give a fuck about me. I always carried some cash with me in case the guys at the door decided I wasn't hot enough to get in for free and when that never happened, I'd give my cash to some guy behind me trying to get in because the boys were always gonna pay at the cost of the girls already on the inside.

I'd camp out in the garage and always shared my cigarettes with girls that were crying drunk about how some dirty boy in the basement made a mess of her and look at her, she's still a mess and the only reason I'm not is because there isn't enough Old Milwaukee in the whole of this house to make me messy like that. People in the basement were screamin over Wiz Khalifa and people in the garage were screamin because they were so hammered and you're always louder when you're drunk. It was like we were all a bunch of babies and waling because we wanted to hear the sound of it.

I remember bringing headphones bunched in my pocket because once I was shitty to enough guys in the house, there wouldn't be anyone left to talk to and if there was, I would be incredibly unlucky. Have you ever put yourself in a position to get hurt because you felt that you deserved it? There were always old basketball hoops rusting at the tops of the driveways at the party houses. Monuments for the sinless. *Recently, I asked my aunt what my dad was like at my age and she said handsome, quiet, and amazing at basketball. Said he was one of those curly-headed Indians that was amazing at basketball and wouldn't you know it, their high school mascot was Blackhawk. I wonder how many grungy parties my dad, the swiftest and only Indian I know anymore, wasted time at.*

At the end of the night, if the cops didn't show, I'd walk around the neighborhood streets nearest my University listening to "Son of Sam" and wondering in which window my reflection would surface as day came to claim his seat in the sky. I knew that night was a woman for obvious reasons and I knew that she'd be gone soon.

## **How To Tell The Good Times**

Do you remember any  
of when we sat  
across from each other  
in 12th grade Spanish?

Do you remember any  
lunches we shared in  
the pink room of  
the cafeteria?

Do you remember any  
of the graduation parties  
you spent trying to soak  
me up?

As if you wanted to remember any.

Do you remember any  
-thing I wrote for you?

Do you remember any  
of the small cat  
brothers in your  
parents' barn?

Do you remember any  
of the bees that burrowed  
into the gift box I gave  
you on your 19th birthday?

Do you remember any  
of the things I put in  
that box? My favorite laser disk?

Do you remember any  
of the parties after we each left  
for college?

Do you remember any  
-thing you said to  
convince me to visit?

Do you remember any  
-thing that happened there?

Do you remember any?  
Do you remember saying  
that women love to write  
about you?

## **Astoria Will Fall**

We weren't—  
I am not happy.

And here, at the platform.

And here, staring at my gumsole sneakers.

And here, feeling permanence only under my fingernails.

And here, on the fourteenth floor balcony of this South Loop apartment.

This luxury high rise sways with the weight of enduring oblivion  
and little pure-bred dogs in boots.

And even I can understand what the swaying is.

I knew what it was when I ran to the guest restroom and felt my legs  
succumb to the sway.

My phone slipped from back pocket and into toilet water,  
sparkling in the white basin. The dead fish phone meant I couldn't

help but to run from balcony to sidewalk for air  
for winter filtered air  
for air from the vapor  
from the drugs of  
from the drugs of  
your fourteenth floor apartment.

At the base of the tower is a boxing gym, swaying  
from its own exertion.

I'd stand on East 9th with a cigarette wondering if I could  
beg

## What's Happened Here?

After "*Knowledge of the Past is the Key to the Future*" By Robert H. Colescott

Arrows in skulls,  
yellow marks against dark skin.  
Shadows make more  
than those standing in them  
dim. With a second breath,  
I understand that people can't be  
made monuments. If  
they're made an example of,  
they're dead already.  
When you consider life  
and how to proceed,  
know that the only safety  
is in standing still, know  
that the only way out is in  
not standing still. I am sitting  
in front of this painting.  
It's got red mountains  
in the background and it looks  
like the Cholla Trail of Camelback  
Mountain with one purple summit  
wedged into the range which  
kind of looks like a badly  
bruised and twisted elbow.  
At the center of the painting  
is a pillar, like a crucifix,  
with a half black, half white being—  
not mixed race, like the body  
has a seam stretching down  
its center and one half is black  
and the other, white.  
The body is also half man and  
half woman and is tied to the pillar  
with bloody arrows toggling  
out of gruesome wounds.  
One is in the skull.  
A white couple glances at the painting  
from behind me. I hear disgust  
in the throats of their gasps.  
They move tenderly to

the next painting: *Washington St.,  
Indianapolis at Dusk*

by Theodor Groll which is beautiful  
but holds no pain in the places  
that everyone can see.

I'm just not sure how to part  
with a piece that screams  
in your face and does not stop  
screaming even after you  
shut your eyes,  
even after you've left the museum.

Still looking at the Groll piece,  
One of them says: "Yeah,  
I like this one,"

## Haunted Places

The forest is sacred.  
I liked to stomp dance with no ribbon shirt  
under the paper birches of my childhood.  
I liked to watch the sun shapes change  
as the wind blew the ensign leaves around.  
The whole place was haunted, the good haunted.  
I would lie face-up in cool grass, sunshine  
glinting through the canopy of Indiana's old growth—

Glinting through the canopy of Indiana's old growth,  
a young body praying.  
Falltime sticks out like old  
branded bricks that paved my way  
from backdoor to back parts  
of a county line forest punctuated with the ashes  
of bonfires had. My round-toed Lebron's  
slap on flattened stacks of  
orange leaves that my 3 yr old sister  
and I had already rolled around in.

And I had already rolled around in  
the scent of school-long hours, but not yet in green jumpers.  
I got girly skinny, was skinned.  
Eighth grade, yellow light buzzes,  
yellow air hovers under  
the greening ceiling tiles of the same middle  
school that my grandad attended.  
The whole place was haunted, the bad haunted.  
Someone always watched as I lifted my plaid skirt to use the toilet  
in my melted memory here.

In my melted memory here,  
my first kiss was like this  
horrible, unholy stained glass image  
of the backside of peeling, beige school lockers.  
The walls were a blank pyramid, pail turquoise cinderblock  
stacked behind my goose-egged head.  
The cutest boy in my class of eight kids  
shoved me against that wall, behind those lockers,  
from the back of the line.  
Clapped a clammy hand over my mouth,

parted his middle and ring finger enough to smudge his lips between.

Said he wished he could keep me tied to a tree, come back to the woods whenever he pleased.

Come back to the woods whenever he pleased as I aged in-between. I moved out of uniform and into low-rise jeans and shirts untucked. The high school lockers were red and painted fresh. In a school of 2,000 students, there was nowhere to be thrown into corners, no where but in plain sight to be. The first party I went to was in the backyard of a boy who lived in those county line woods I was talking about. A huge blue swimming pool seemed to fill the first acre of his yard. There were Christmas lights strung everywhere and tents set up like sweat lodges for drunk teenagers. No one tied me to a tree, but there was a pickup truck.

No one tied me to a tree, but there was a pickup truck parked by an old pole barn, hollow and unwhole. An indigo place growing black like all haunted space. I thank God he was Christian and his mom probably told him sex was a sin that he wouldn't be forgiven. I swear to God if I ever have a son.

I swear to God if I ever have a son we will be plain people, *plain* people. There will be no trees where my son and I live. There will be no pick up trucks with beds for trunks there will be no pick up trucks, no pick up trucks, no fucking pick up trucks with beds for trunks. There will be none. I'll teach him to live like he's got barbed-wire hands, like his jaw is a bear trap and his tongue, a great bear so that the forest can keep being sacred. It isn't fair, I just want the forest to keep being sacred.



IF WE TURN INTO A TREE, I'D LIKE TO BE THE TRUNK. I KNOW TOO WELL WHAT IT'S  
LIKE TO BE THE LEAVES.

## A Critical Angle

I had never used or heard the word “scree” before,  
but in a dream I asked myself what it meant and I

saw loose stone falling behind me off a cliff after  
I lifted my own self up.

I find lots of moments in life to be lost in parallels  
like when a flight is landing and your head fills up

with so much pressure that you think it might  
explode but then you swallow and feel relieved

for a moment and then it happens all over again  
and you have no recollection that you have the power

to relieve yourself.

And when I start thinking about this, I don't feel at all  
compelled to say hello to my high school chemistry teacher

sitting just one row ahead of me on this exact flight.  
People always want the best plots of grave in your head space.

Don't they?

Don't they?

I guess if you're going to bury them anyway,  
bury them where they'll stay.

## Significant Drunk Junctures

1. I order a coffee at the bar at 1 a.m. to compliment my fourth gin and tonic and tell a stranger that my weapon of choice would be an energy sword because I'm better at close combat.
2. I start a verbal argument with a young white woman who has a young white woman in a war bonnet tattooed on her bicep.
3. On Cinco de Mayo, I climb onto the roof of the Burnside Inn and once I get there, I don't know what to do so I just begin slowly pacing back and forth until one of the bartenders notices me out there and helps me back down.
4. I send you an unnecessary text about our foreign literature class that leads to us studying together. I just peak at your face from behind a short story by Chinua Achebe, the title of which I cannot recall. I wasn't drunk then.
5. I get a car at 2:30 A.M. to take me downtown and meet you outside of the closing bars. We briefly talk about Game of Thrones. Which I've never seen, but I tell you that I've been to the set of the show in Dubrovnik. Telling people that I've been to Dubrovnik comes up a lot because Game of Thrones comes up a lot. Anyway, this is the first time I can stand to look into your eyes because I've always been a little bit scared of what you'll see in mine.
6. My marshmallow belly feels even more marshmallowy as you spin me around in the basement of my favorite bar. I'm a little shaken but it feels warm here.
7. Christmas Eve Eve, I text you from bed upstairs saying "I am sorry I got so drivk. My belly hutch. I love you." I pay special attention to spell "love" correctly.
8. I puke on myself and fall asleep on a toilet in the girl's restroom of a sport's bar and you run in and wipe my mouth off and you don't even get upset that I got throw-up on your nice rain jacket.
9. On New Years Eve, your roommate and I recite word-for-word that E-Harmony commercial with the short-haired, blonde girl. She's not a game-player and she likes nice guys. Maybe it was [Match.com](https://www.match.com). This feels significant.
10. We sit in a musty bar downtown, drinking Maker's and cokes. Your dad plays Positively 4th Street on the Juke Box. He sits back down with us and we talk about America; present and future, as if stuffed in a breadbox.

## **On This Beautiful Day with Your Beautiful Dad**

He says,

There is no shame in waking up in the a.m.  
and saying to yourself,  
“I am damn good looking.”  
There is no shame in waking up in the a.m.  
Ain't no one going to tell you that enough  
for you to feel it.  
In fact, coming from anyone other than yourself,  
you won't even hear it.  
You think you're going to wander your way  
into a little pond of happiness,  
of sheer content?  
Well you won't.  
That pond doesn't even exist.  
Not yet.  
If you take anything away from this conversation,  
take this and splash in it:  
Lay down kid,  
face the sun and piss yourself a puddle of happiness.  
It's got to start with you.  
It always did.  
So say it with me, “I am damn good looking.”  
Anyone who thinks otherwise,  
Fuck em'  
Now quit being so rude to yourself,  
so damn rude. You wouldn't treat anyone else like this.  
Not even if they were ugly as shit— inside or out.  
Just enjoy this beautiful day with your beautiful dad.

## Blackberry Nights

Spring exhaled,  
and being carried on its breath were petals, cracked brown.  
They panicked in the open air before my windshield,  
rushed in through jarred windows.  
Once-blooms have burst into peaches,  
letting us taste the season that just won't retreat.  
They say April is the least of the months,  
washed in rain and slow inertia.

April is hard, they sometimes say.

But before then, we poked the holes in the sky  
that are the stars and watched them bleed like bullets through my sun roof.  
Wet air fills the tight spaces between us.  
Elliot Smith sings his one happy song and  
the streetlights drip with purple-black ink.  
Sparkling seeds of light, falling onto seasoned pavement—  
making morning lakes of midnight puddles.

When we would instead walk home in the dark,  
you'd stop me every few yards to pull me into you.  
We kicked through the leaves of a late winter.  
My sweatshirt still smelled like cigarettes in September,  
but I prefer when it smells of swimming pool and cedar wood. So I give it to you.

The trees breath a dim tragedy. We won't see it until morning—  
we may not see it then— green wanting orange too much.

These are the nights I wouldn't mind finding more of—  
in a bushel or tangled canopy.  
A sticky, purple handful is all anyone seems to get.  
But can you imagine being in Washington state  
where the veneers of blackberry vines stretch over entire counties?

### **It's Not the Maze that We Get Lost In (Pineapple Fruit)**

If you rinse slices of pineapple fruit with salt water— cut the acidity— gets rid of the enzyme that burns your tongue, skin. The core, the tough and bitter center, is the most nutritious part. Isn't it always? In Wahiawa, Hawaii, on the Dole Plantation, is the world's largest hedge maze. Two and a half miles of clay path hook around three acres, creating a giant pineapple. The hedge is made of hibiscus and takes most guests one hour to complete. The Spanish brought the fruit to Hawaii in the 1500's. Colonialism. Occupation. Enslavement, displacement. A Human Condition. But thank God for the pineapple and every other cash crop like it— we simply don't know what the women would do without their piña coladas. What if we, the maze-walkers, were the libertines? Would we know it? I know that where the vegetation is thin, you can cheat your way to the center— cut minutes off your time.

## Things Grow Up and Out

When my sister found out  
that my boyfriend is from England  
she said , “what the hell.”  
You’d think this were a question  
but it almost never is.

She said there’d be something grave  
growing between a part-red woman  
and the man who is the reason why  
she is only part-red.  
She said the whole country has outgrown  
and digested us.  
Only the kernels and bean shells  
remain.

And I said that’s fertilizer.  
Think about being  
something that grows in the earth.  
Think about being something  
that’s preceded contentions of the land.  
Think about being forgiveness  
and not simply having to give it.

## **For Julianita, at the IMA**

*After "Indian Girl (Julianita)" by Robert Henri*

I see a massive pine tree  
in what's left of your shadow.  
I see your braids have been assembled  
so long, there's no strips of tan  
hide to tie them off. Just splayed black  
paint brushes that fall well  
beneath your breasts and begin  
working on the unfinished  
Navajo design that frames  
your slumped body.

In the placard beside you,  
it says that you were one of Henri's favorite "sitters."

I look at you and I see myself  
becoming more white  
like the faces of our currency.  
I see the faces of our currency  
commissioning an image of their favorite  
"Indian Girl." Julianita, why is your name  
in parenthesis beside the title "Indian Girl"  
when I wish that my eyes  
were the same brown and held  
my name at their centers?

I wanted to tell you I've seen  
American bison lurking  
in the backs of all of these paintings  
and open mouths, gaping with no sound  
like flowers unearthed,  
like forgiveness unearthed,  
like people unearthed.



**Hello Joseph,**

As explained on the phone, you can

get married to Abigail.

To avoid delays

provide information documents

**DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION WE NEED:**

**FROM BENEFICIARY**

-Two photographs, passport style

-Marriage Certificate

-Certified criminal record (Including Chronological Case Summary, Plea Disposition) (they'll want to know)

**FROM PETITIONER ( Her ):**

-Two of you, passport style

-a picture ID (Driver's, Passport)

-Copy paystubs, showing your hourly rate, or your annual pay,  
you will have to find a  
lease on your husband.

**More(personal) Information(about your body):**

-Height (where does you head fall under his?)

-Weight (significantly less than beneficiary, we presume)

-Color of eyes (does not matter if they change color when you cry)

-Color of hair (must have hair)

### **BONA FIDE EVIDENCE**

We demonstrate to the government  
your marriage is in good faith including your  
application from your

the list:

Love letters in envelopes

Photos together

Photos with the other's family (applicable) (if family can afford to  
you) (if you are still allowed your home country) (if you'll be able to get  
back into America)

Correspondences between you

Prenuptial

Wills or trusts for which you've named your spouse

Ownership papers

what do you own together?

Proof of children you've had etc.

**VERY IMPORTANT:**

If any information

changes

at any time,

notify us

immediately.

This includes mostly

money,

intentions.

Thank you!

**“What does postpartum depression mean for the kid?”**

if my mother’s mother dies  
I will not be allowed to mourn

on the day I found out she was dying  
I purchased an Apache Tear

an Apache Tear is for those who are grieving  
and boy do I grieve

and I selfishly thought  
this is not the worst probable loss I can currently imagine

this is not the worst probable loss I can currently imagine  
and I selfishly thought

at least my mother has a mother she can mourn  
she can rub some other stone smooth

## **The Heart Bleeds Something Like Nails**

My steak was medium-rare at my wedding  
and when I cut into the limp slab,  
the hot, red-dyed, juices spilled out  
onto the page of a white porcelain plate—  
slid around the knife, jabbed, as to  
avoid. And when my father-in-law  
of 22 minutes rose to give a toast,  
the hot, red-dyed juices of my heart's nucleus  
spilled out like a Rorschach, for anyone  
with a broken heart and looking  
for a Rorschach, across the satin page  
of a dress I was wearing. Across the top  
of where my mother already poked herself and bled  
trying to pin my sash into a perfect bow.  
And she hangs around my neck like  
a dead, winged thing.  
A dead winged thing that probably  
loves me.

But when my own dad rose to dance with me  
to Cash and Dylan's "Girl from the North  
Country," I heard everyone in the room  
spill over with their own pool of heart liquid  
until we were all splashing around  
in a tarn of rusty water.

THE CLOSER THIS BOOK GETS TO BEING FINISHED, THE MORE I'M THINKING ABOUT  
THE POSSIBILITY OF MY MOTHER READING IT. IT'S A VERY SMALL CHANCE, BUT IF  
YOU'RE READING THIS, I'M SORRY.

## **And Perhaps Without JFK**

I don't do the research to know for sure  
but my grandmother tells me she is born  
on the Pima reservation in Scottsdale. Without  
hospital, without record, without doula,  
and without.

She exists on some censuses as white— though  
she is not and her offspring are not  
and theirs'—  
and not at all on others.

She was the third of six or seven children  
her full-blooded mother bore.  
Her dad, white and savior, died of tuberculosis when she was  
very young. She doesn't tell me that she was raped by her  
stepfather, the second white man her full-blooded mother  
shoved all her crows toward. Instead  
she tells me that her stepfather would drive her  
to the cinema where she would meet her boyfriends.

She tells me that five years before my father was born,  
John F. Kennedy kissed her on the mouth at a campaign  
event in Muncie, where RFK would deliver the news  
of his brother's death just eight years later,  
at the university my parents would meet at, where I,  
then my sister, then my brother  
would be born.  
And perhaps without JFK,  
perhaps—

## **Teenagers in Indian Country**

He Who Walks Against the Wind  
passes us a blue glass bottle  
of apple pie moonshine.

Us, part-white kids without names,  
sit on the skin of another animal.

Gray Wolf emerges through a part in the tipi,  
addresses us counterclockwise.

He smells like marijuana  
and tells us that we can walk against the wind  
that we, too, can walk against the wind.

## Good Brows

One of my third graders  
gives me an image of myself  
that she's just drawn. The eye  
brows are black, lopsided  
smudges that make me look  
too recently removed  
from the neanderthal species.

My grandma always told me  
my eyebrows were spectacular.  
That they are guardians of  
hooded, almond eyes. She over-  
plucked hers as a girl because  
she was ashamed to have  
so much fluff on her face.

She also bleached her mustache  
until her skin began to fade white

until her skin began to fade white  
until her skin began to fade white  
until her skin began to fade white  
until her skin began to fade white

and she decided it was better  
to have a black mustache.

When I was 16, a classmate asked  
if I ever even tweezed.  
Yeah, of course I do. If I didn't,  
you wouldn't be able to see  
my damn face.

Do white girls ever even tweeze?  
I know my mom's brows  
are nearly invisible and I  
know she wishes mine were too.

A friend once  
told me that the darker,  
the better when it comes to eye



brow make-up until she saw mine  
filled in and and succinctly declared,  
“too dark!”

I see my husband’s ex-girlfriend  
on an advertisement for eyebrow  
tattooing. Wouldn’t you want to remember  
how we looked before?

## **A Sovereign Man**

A Navajo man was executed  
despite his tribe fundamentally disagreeing with capital punishment.

A white girl that I follow on Instagram posts  
of her disgust toward the government's disregard of tribal sovereignty.

The white girl says that the Navajo man('s)  
crimes were a product of his poor quality of life on the rez

and this is the fault of  
"White America"

“ ”  
“ ”  
“ ”  
“ ”  
“ ”  
“ ”  
“ ”  
“ ”

My dad, a Cherokee man and lawyer  
tells me that the American government should have never allowed sovereignty.

“If we have to assimilate  
we should assimilate  
entirely.”

My dad shows me the federal court write-up of the case,  
he shows me how he likes his hair cut now.

When asked if he'd like to share any final apologies with his victims' family  
the Navajo man says, “no, I'm good.”

## **The Tribe He Carries**

My younger brother squints  
and tells me it's a shame he doesn't look  
as Indian as me and our sister.

Tells me it's a shame that he can't have his heritage  
at the roots of his hair instead of by the way  
his head is shaped and his plated teeth.

If the word is anguish—  
it's anguish.

He tells me it's a crying shame that he's blonde  
and he's pale and someone must have made  
fun of him for saying he's an Indian like us

because he all but stopped saying it.  
And so my sister dyed her hair blonde and stopped  
planting herbs for him and I think this too is culture.

## Green Card Interview

The notice inviting my husband and I  
to have our love tested for validity  
by a stranger arrived in the mailbox  
of our previous apartment—  
our first apartment together  
with its original hard woods,  
gas range, spacious closets.  
We crept in the light  
that beamed through large windows,  
trying not to disturb loose floor boards.  
This was the apartment that we had  
to vacate because its walls  
had given us mold toxicity  
illness and a series of intestinal parasites.  
I can only imagine that most of what we  
say to the immigration officer will  
be about the times we've spent  
peering into a toilet bowl together.

**“What does postpartum depression mean for the kid?”**

Supposing beauty lives,  
where does the lineage end?  
I'll never have to ask.  
I can't even imagine my mother.

## Washing Machine

Ethnic and heavy histories  
bend the sorrow, inherently mine.  
Scottsdale sun bakes the skin that knows  
nothing but the red.  
Ripe. Rock. Red. Now  
for the healers, grafters and the runners.

May streaks of Cherokee burden break every ribbon  
ever stretched to be the aching end.

Never in—  
but in ideas, we spin.  
A blue tongue drips an inked phrase like new rain.

## Buried Hair

In an old fire pit in the second acre of my childhood backyard.

In my tradition, you bury your hair.  
Each strand is an extension  
of the thoughts and imagine  
carrying on your head  
every thought you've ever had.  
Only cut the hair— the beauty you've grown—  
if you've lost something bigger.  
Sometimes things are too heavy to hold up  
by the neck.

In South Bend, on the tracks of the South Shore Line.

When my hairdresser, Lexi, cut  
my hair into a blunt bob, I didn't tell  
her that as she was cutting,  
I imagined the threads of my ancestors  
breaking and combusting and falling  
off my head. I heard small screams over  
her small-talk of day trips to Chicago  
with the man that she's mostly  
seeing and her vegetarian attempts... well pescatarian,  
because she fuckin' loves crab cakes  
and who can blame her?  
I know what I asked for.

Among the wetlands behind St. Lawrence.

My long dark hairs used to sprout  
up like weeds woven into every carpet I walked on.  
Now that my hair is short,  
most of them seem to stay with me.  
No space for braids until my brain says,  
“Have these back. They're for the garden.”

Around five feet south of the stone grotto at Huntington Catholic School.

The tumor on my grandma's ovary  
was the size of a grapefruit and cut off  
her ability to think about anything

else and so she cut off all her hair.  
Once pin straight and black black,  
appeared in wan patches of soft fuzz.

Under a stone on the west bank of the Big Thompson.

The intake therapist at my university asked  
me how many calories I eat in a day  
and I replied however many calories it takes  
to remain awake for six consecutive hours.  
However many calories it takes to drive  
home without setting off the no-seatbelt alert.  
However many it takes to superimpose myself on a small  
space of wall beside the dry bar, beneath the reprint Monet.

Under the trellis in my grandma's backyard.

And there, it almost came at us.  
Only the second bald eagle that I've seen  
in my life and now it's in a tree,  
overhanging my driveway. I stand in near  
shock, breathing through my mouth  
as the eagle takes its head to unimaginable angles.  
He didn't say anything to me, but he could have.  
In my head, he's still there on the tree and you're there with me,  
capsized heart and mouth-breathing.

Beneath the dust at the base of the cactus that looks like a middle finger on Camelback Mtn.

Does my dad know about my arms?  
Does he know about my arms? The doctor asks me  
to pull up my sleeves and I only hear "take off  
your clothes." My arms aren't his monkeys and he knows  
that and so when I pull up my sleeves  
I can't tell him what spills out,  
I can't tell him what he will see.

Tucked under third base at Herr-Baker field.

My grandma  
painted sparkles on her things—  
a new wave war paint—  
gift wrap, decorative basins,



stones she found, her television stand,  
bathroom door, the keyboard to her  
old computer, the mouse pad,  
the handlebars of the treadmill  
that took up most of her spare bedroom,  
Mooncake wrappers, bottles of Downy,  
milk cartons filled with coins  
and then she gave them to us.

In a coffee can on the ninth hole of Player's Club Golf Course.

My husband, without knowing what  
this means for me, despises the sparkles  
I sometimes wear on my face. The sparkles  
glued to our Christmas ornaments, the sparkles  
I've painted on my eye lids, my fingernails,  
my elbows, my lips, our lamp shades,  
fossilized bouquets, single shoes,  
our bed posts, door knobs,  
the litter box, the unity vases, old  
wine bottles  
and then I give them to him.

In the drainage grate where I saw my first rattlesnake.

Yes, yes I remember the first time  
I used a tampon. At a track meet,  
before I ran the 1600 and I just started  
in my spandex. I was too scared to ask  
for help because I was too old  
to have never used a tampon, to have  
just begun menstruating. Amenorrhea.  
When I get the tampon in, I feel it swell  
inside of me and I'd rather bleed in my shorts  
than endure this pain. I panic and yank and yank  
at the little cotton string, sure I would now  
have a tampon permanently in me. It finally  
released and the momentum of my hands  
carried it and slapped it against the stall door,  
splattering a bloody Jackson Pollock  
on the chipped purple.  
I called my creation "Buried Hair."