

WE
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CATE
TELEPATHI-
CALLY

the Neutral Zone

The Neutral Zone is a diverse, youth-driven teen center dedicated to promoting personal growth through artistic expression, community leadership and the exchange of ideas.

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Red Beard Press

Red Beard Press is an independent, youth-driven publishing company dedicated to creating cutting-edge literary arts projects, publishing emerging voices, and inspiring passionate literary communities.

Essentially... youth publishing the emerging voices of other youth & attempting to spark a love for words.

We hope to fill a vital role in rediscovering the unity that once connected our society to literature. We have the potential to pique both current and future generations' interest in the literary arts, bringing together an increasingly diverse population with a common desire to read good books. It's urgent that RBP flourish in today's society in order to impress upon young people that literature still has the power to serve as a bridge to both inspiration and insightful dialogue.

Red Beard Press is also necessary in order to provide a platform for youth voices in Ann Arbor and beyond. It will help amplify how we feel and how we process our world in a society where our voices are often either misinterpreted or drowned out.

We need books for our literary imaginations to survive and we need to create opportunities for young people to write them. Red Beard Press fills those needs by publishing books that young people want to read and by putting those books directly in their hands.

Loewe Denken Wir, teen editor
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Cecilia Shoopmann

Raptures, Raptors or Something(1,2,3)

Three...

Two...

One...

And we were gone.

It wasn't slow. See, what happened is we decided to get on a plane, to leave, but it crashed. I think. I'm not really sure. I know we're gone though. I think it's some sort of safety thing. The pilot seemed nice and all, he shook my hand. It felt very adult. It's an adult thing to shake a pilot's hand.

It was sort of like that space shuttle that blew up in the eighties. The Challenger. That's what it was called. They were going to send a teacher to space but she never made it. I like to think I'm like that teacher and I was going to go to space and I did all the training and I went into the zero gravity chamber thing and I ate an apple this morning.

I wonder where that teacher is now. I mean, I know she's dead, but like, where is she? She could be in her hometown or in Florida or maybe there isn't an afterlife and I'm kind of in the middle.

Not dead, but not alive.

So we're gone, that's my point really. There's no one left. The grass in our lawns is growing and there's still blood in the carpet. The quarantine didn't really work. Everyone got infected, and that's why we decided to take the plane, but that didn't work out. The pilot asked us if we were afraid when we got here. He asked us about our lives and why our little town was in quarantine, but we didn't answer him, and that's mostly because we don't know. He seemed bothered by that.

We were in a little town in the middle of nowhere. We

didn't have cars, there was no reason. It was small and there were no secrets or mail. I always liked the notion of mail. Seemingly useless paper items being delivered to you every day. That's the dream right there. I think I'd like mail.

A private corporation built the thing on the hill. It looks like an observatory but it's not because no one goes there. Soon after it was built, my neighbors on the left were put into quarantine. I don't know why. Nothing was really wrong, but the people from on top of the hill said something had happened.

Something that went in the wires and they told us we shouldn't use our phones and when I picked up our receiver all I heard was my neighbor saying "no.. stay with me.. please" over and over again and crying a lot and that was strange.

The people said it was a rapture or a raptor or something. I don't remember. They said it over the radio and then they started screaming and then the radio went dead and wouldn't restart.

And we were put under quarantine.

We left our home. We thought leaving the town would save us somehow? But I guess it didn't. I think it just made it happen faster. It being our ultimate demise. But hey, everyone's gotta go sometime right? I guess our time was now. On this plane. With the very adult pilot, and a rickety seating system. I'd blame the plane for us. I think the pilot blames himself. His house is under quarantine now too. He's alive but maybe I'll see him soon. I think our town is the first of many to disappear.

We're like the modern Wild West. But with fewer cowboys and horses. And probably more raptures or raptors or something...

Part Two

The most peculiar thing about everyone leaving or whatever was that the water kept running. Nancy, down the street had been filling her water bottle in the sink and she started coughing real bad, like the type of cough that happens when soda pop goes down the wrong pipe, it was fizzy and painful. She had gripped the sink and coughed a whole lot, for like longer than two minutes (I was counting, but I stopped after two minutes, thirty-five seconds, I was bored) and fell over while fading away. I mean, it's not the best way to go, but it was pretty alright. If I got to choose how I died, I would want to die in a volcano. Because that means my body would burn up and stuff and no one would find it, but that would also be a sad way to die because no one would find my body. I'd become a milk carton kid.

Anyway, the water was running. Nancy's water bottle overflowed into her sink and the water washed into her carpets but the blood stayed there. It stayed caked in the pink shag rug and it was very eighties, the carpet, not the blood. Nancy was young and not from the eighties. I liked Nancy sometimes she cried in the park but that's because she was alone in the world.

But, aren't we all? Alone in the world, that is. I don't mean that in a sad, 'look at me I need attention' way, I don't think anyone acts like that, but we come into the world usually alone and we leave it usually alone, yeah there are people in the middle that we probably care about but honestly, I don't think they matter in the end.

No one does.

Part 3

Sometimes my earbuds will stop my music and just connect with nothing there's soft buzzing. Like the sounds a tv makes on the salt-n-pepper channels, or like oil simmering in a shallow pan. I mean, it's not like a loud bee buzzing, but like the buzzing you get when you first put your telephone to your ear. I think it's called ambient noise. But I don't know. Ambient. Am bi ent. That feels like a fake word. Like I heard it on a subway in a busy city

where I didn't hear the whole conversation but just one person say to another "ambient." I couldn't find it in my dictionary and my family doesn't use the Internet, my parents believe it's for witches and sinners. It's not like they're weirdly religious, in fact they've never even been to church. And we have one in our little town. They write letters to each other that's cute, but it's not like they write to me. I think I could write some pretty kickin' words back at them.

I think they're afraid. They won't teach me about important things like planes and earth and volcanos and diet soda. I think they think I'll eventually wither and die because of over information. Or under. I dunno. I think that all of my family is afraid. They're afraid for the thing in the hill. They're afraid for my quarantined neighbors. They're afraid for the reasons Nancy doesn't sleep at night. That's a scary thing. It's frightening to think that Nancy can't sleep because something is haunting her. Something that she can't see something that we can't see. That this thing is so much larger than us all its hard to grasp. I haven't yet. I might. Someday. Maybe. But hey. I'm still here. I'm still here.

Still here.

Still.

Here.

Am I?

I hope.

This could be a dream I suppose.

But also my parents are still writing to each other. That's all they do anymore. They write and write and write. They don't actually talk anymore. But who needs that? Not I.

Globoe-Love Letters

This is the sound that loves makes when you drop it on the ground

That's what you said then you dropped our magic eight ball on the cement

I remember bending down and grabbing the little blue prism that fell out and it said "try again later"

I handed it to you and said you had ruined it but it was alright and we could in fact try it again

This is the sound that I make when the ground meets the sky

We kicked our shoes off and watched as one of yours sailed towards the roof

We had no power to stop it but we stopped swinging and as your shoe reached the roof a bird rose in a magnificent flurry of snow feathers and laces our jackets and scarves were bundled together and so were we that was the day we got lost on the way home

This is the sound that you make when you realize the ground and sky are in love

You had fallen into the lake and I stood on the shore and laughed I laughed until I cried until I laughed until I stopped because I realized you weren't in front of me anymore I became worried I thought you were gone then you pushed me in the lake and you laughed and cried and laughed and we spent the night by the lake you and me me and you it was nice and we were wet

This is the sound we made when the sky fell and the ground opened

She doesn't sleep anymore she used to and suddenly we became too much and she started to slip away we talked once on how to remedy this but our hands fit well together and we got lost with

the night and it didn't matter our collective heart was trying to
sleep she worried for us and her worry found magic eight balls
shoes and grass stained jeans and our hands fit well together and
she slept for a little bit

That was the sound we made together

The lake is gone now and she is too our collective heart has left
and we stand in the desert trying to fit together again she is gone
and there is a hole where she once stood dogs cats and birds won't
fill it the hole is uniquely shaped it only fits her and in all honesty
we are on a fault line slowly spreading apart we are damaged

This is the sound she makes when she sees the Skyscraper (me)
lean down and kiss the Red House (you)

Febreze

It was never their intention, they rather enjoyed their basement, and this was not how they wanted to lose it.

But it happened, and now it was redder than planned, and smellier. When the neighbors would ask, “what’s going on in there?” They would respond, “Oh, you know” and that was it. Another dead thing in the house.

They used a lot of febreze.

Voicemail

“Hey. It’s me again. Sorry about this. I didn’t mean to, well, I did, but it was kinda an accident. It really shouldn’t have happened like that. I don’t think it was really my fault, like, well, see, it wouldn’t’ve happened if you hadn’t gone out of town. I don’t mean to blame you, but I guess I am. Well, sorry. It’s kinda my fault. You shouldn’t deal with me. So anyway, I’ll get you a new one. You like pomeranians, right? I’m sorry, I guess, yeah. Call me back. Please. I’m sorry. I swear.”

Clara Kaul

2007

My backyard is made completely of cement, which means we are not allowed to run too fast or fall too hard. In the park, there are entire oceans of grass and there we let go of safety and listen to the sounds our bodies make when they hit the ground.

These are the rules: cement hurts flesh and grass is more forgiving. I have broken three bones: both my arms, and the big toe on my right foot. All of these were on cement. The first time I broke my arm was because I was riding a gear bike and I didn't know how to stop. Purple blooms dotted my arms, like the hurt part of peaches. They ached when I poked at them but I did it anyway because it reminded me where my arms are on my body.

After I break my first arm Catherine brings me a book about wolves and I read it with my whole self. I get a waterproof cast and when I jump in the pool, an entire sea creeps under the plaster. In school, Mr. Kelly teaches us about the abyss. He says there are the things down there no one will ever know about and then we draw pictures of them. Abby draws a goldfish made entirely of eyes. Abby is my best friend and sometimes we lock ourselves in a closet and turn the lights on and off and watch our pupils expand and contract.

We are amazed by the fact that our bodies know so well how to be bodies.

How to react into safety without us ever telling them to.

Our eyes forgive easily.

My mom thinks I need glasses because I have trouble reading and she takes me to an eye doctor who has me read letters off of a poster but really the problem is all in my brain.

On a field trip, Mr. Seagull shows us the way water flows all the way down the hill. He calls it "Ann Arbor's Grand Canyon". A boy in my class, Alex, falls in the river. It is cold out and his skin prickles into goosebumps. One time, Abby connected all the freckles on my arm into a constellation.

We go to the planetarium and our own private sky becomes

thick with stars.

We're all a little bit in love. We play with dominoes during indoor recess. Georgia knocks over the first one with the tip of her pinky, the lightest touch, and the whole room collapses. I want to watch it again, and so we reline up the dominoes. This time, Georgia lets me knock it over. My hand extends forward, carefully, calculated, waiting for the collision of flesh and wood. I hold the whole house of my body still other than the tip of my finger, reaching.

ECOLOGY CLASS

in ecology, we study the trees.

the definition of ecology is how the earth interacts with itself, what the core does to the dirt, what the dirt does the roots, what the roots do to the plants, what the plants do to the air, what the air does to the sun, what the sun does to the sea, what the sea does at all, and vice versa.

in ecology, we learn that the whole earth is a web, and that's not even a metaphor, it is. it is one sprawling hand, one tangle of hair, one swollen bruise. we learn that

aspen

trees are all clones of each other, underneath the soil there

is a

matted map of roots, the break of their bodies vulnerable in their unification, but bolder still.

in ecology, matthew sits next to me.

We talk about our top colleges, and the essays we are pouring over. He asks me if

we can become tree witches together and I say yes,

absolutely.

it is the only time talking about the future doesn't make my whole body cringe

he talks to me about college supplements, and I

think about Massachussettes, and how the trees there aren't

the

same as Michigan trees, and I'm going to have to learn them all over, a whole new state to discover.

in ecology, Courtney tells us that there is only one old growth forest still standing in Michigan.

it is up north and the trees are a thousand years old,

they are so wide the earth has to break around them.

we go on a tree walk and

I think about the London Planetree, which looks like a
Sycamore
but is better for urban locations, how its bark is flaky, and
gaps in
areas it shouldn't, the Bur Oak, which is a dying breed, even
though
it is, undeniably, a king, and the Northern catalpa, and the
Littleleaf linden,
and the Japanese Zelkova, and the Callary pair tree, and the
Honeylocust,
and the Norway Maple, and the Sugar Maple, and the
White Oak, and the
Eastern Redbud, and the Tree of Heaven, and of every tree
that
stands stoically on the curbside, or bows its head to the
wind.
Matthew is a foot taller than me which means when he
talks
sometimes it's to the sky instead of to me. I don't want to
ask him
to repeat himself too often so I usually just nod. we have
plans to meet
up in salem next year. I have not known him for very long,
but
in ecology, everything is everything else. there are roots
that I
did not put here but grew anyway. there is a web that grew
around
us, in this bitten lip of an era, and there is a dumb safety
here that
refuses to acknowledge that it is almost over and I love it. I
have never seen
these trees as closely as I have today. they are there with
their bark,
their flat leaves, the soft fruit, the hard shell, the stems, the

dirt

which never asks for more than it is willing to give, the
roots it houses,

the roots it built, the air it softens, the sun it drinks, the sea
it has never

laid eyes on but loves anyway because in ecology nothing is
ever too far away

to love anyway.

Grocery

i love grocery stores.

i love the produce:

the lipstick colored apples,

the bumpy oranges,

the bundles of sweet and ripe grapes.

this west gate kroger is dumb-delicate.

i want to fly down the aisles in shopping

carts, punch the bags of flour until they burst,

there is an ecstasy that comes from this wanting,

this deep deep love of mine in a grocery store,

the thick aisles, the floor the snaps like gum,

milk cartons lined up like 1st graders. what

a beauty. what a march of color. what are you

doing if you aren't holding someone's hand

and running down the bread aisle? what are

you doing if your heart doesn't chomp like mine does?

for grocery stores or for this love I didn't think possible.

for the heads of patient lettuce. for the slabs

of meat and cake and butter. the water in this

air is dense with love. i swallow it whole.

Sienna Party

A screaming tongue drips out the stereo of the clunky blue sienna. Julia Shapiro's sarcastic voice leaks through the car your tattoos are so deep, they really make me think. Jaime sings along, their voice clear and stable, and the blur of traffic lights blink around us. I swallow mouthfuls of cold Michigan air, we drive down the throat of Ann Arbor, and Julia sings we are having a party / and the city's teeth break around us. Jaime kisses me on the cheek at a red light. This is the opposite of stagnancy. To be moving forward faster than you can run, to be the foot pounding sidewalk, a bullet, a gulp of water swallowed and choked, to announce that you're afraid. Are there others out there who think like us? Julia sings, breathless, the strum of an electric guitar behind her. I think about my best friend. Their hair a slice of bright and unapologetic red, in Missouri. A new and ghostless world. A state I have never set foot in, one three hundred dollar plane and bus ride from me. If you dance, if you dance no girls will give you a chance. Julia tells us this, her voice looming in the tiny and powerful universe of this old and dented thing, a God, of sorts. What a parade we are. The bass shakes the floor of the car, and I cough on this sudden air, this 15 minute transverse down this blushing, stupid, town. These are the ways we have carved out where it is we belong. No one knows better how to craft a kingdom better than the people I love. Jaime stocks their room full of plants, hangs a fake and luminescent sun from a string and this is their own universe. Loewe draws pictures on scrap pieces of paper, her loopy figures marking their own territory, turning it inside and out. We are inviting our best friends so they can have a good time. Julia sings and I am thankful for my own flexible and impermeable love, what it fills, what it can contain, how it stretches, are they having fun? Julia says, I can picture her head twirling to the gentle guitar. I am not ready to leave. But I am ready to go. Oh, are they having fun? We are both singing, as the town roles under us. 4 months. Then I will cut open fresh envelopes, lick them closed, seal them with everything I've got. We can create a long world. A map, a web, something concrete.

Stretching from Northampton to Ann Arbor to St. Louis to East Lansing to Chicago to Ithaca to Toronto. Julia sings I think they're having fun, oh I think they're having fun. And a small world crumbles. And I open the car door.

Why Didn't Anyone Tell Me?

Part 1: Ten Years

Last week, I forgot where I was four times.
I reached for the door handle and was surprised
to feel it under my skin. I walked to the down
the stairs and was confused as how I got to
the bottom. Last week, I stared down a
hot and unholy radiator. I did not touch it.
I splashed cold water on my face
until whatever is inside me unfurled from my skin.

Part 2: None of Us Know Why

In 7th grade, I tried to open my locker and
was convinced I was in a dream.

I sat by
that tree for an entire recess period looking at
nothing
but my hands.

My friends called to me.

I did not answer.

Part 3:

Who lets a child wander around not knowing they are part
ghost?

Jaime Davidson

Magic Boy Chant

There will be no blood cut out of her body today. There will be a dog drooling ribbons. We will sit on the floor next to him so he feels safe. There will be medication in a bottle and it will be taken in groups of four, four, and two. There will be a moment where someone you talked to once at the bus stop will smile at you and this will be your secret. Your teacher will take her children to work and they will want to walk through the halls with the big kids. There will be no blood on the sheets today. Instead, you will say, "hello, girls" and she will smile like an idiot. There will only be bad dreams but they will be your dreams, yours, yours, yours! Your dad will be talking to your mom and you will be nowhere in the room and he will still use your pronouns right. Your sister will live another day. She will write a line from our song we sing so loud in the car on your bicep. In the rain Queen Bee will walk to your house. You will try to figure it out again: how you can possibly treat a girl like that right? You will touch her recklessly and hate yourself for it. Your sister will walk away from you on those two live legs. A dog will bark and launch right at your face and knock out of you what you thought you had stowed away so well. You will want to kiss your girlfriend goodbye a lot better than you do but you won't know where your brain went. By the time you find it she will be gone. The girls in your dreams will show up in every bathroom you go into. They will always make you dizzy, that is a fact. You will go there anyways because it is quiet. You will be hypnotized by the music your teacher plays all morning. The boys in your class will be humming it the whole day and you will enjoy it. There will be nothing wrong with you loving them for a bit. You talk in German with your friends like it's the

other half of a grapefruit. One of your friends tells you she cried when you didn't come to class yesterday. Another will tell you about the hospital she visited, the laser eye surgery, and the whites of eyes as if they're cracked eggs. You will worry about finding a body but when you do it will still be breathing. Electric guitar and haircuts and drills to heads will make the clouds gather. Your dreams würde kein Widerstand machen. Everyone will be alive when you go to bed.

Pick Her up by the Scruff of Her Neck

My sister covers her window with a blanket when she isn't feeling well. Last year we shared a room and our beds sat side by side, leaving dents in the carpet. This year I am in my biggest sister's room and my old bed is only someplace I sleep when I am too tired to be alone. When I got sick my mom made me sleep in that bed with the animal comforter so my sister could check on me to make sure we didn't have to go to the emergency room. She was the one who helped me get dressed when my skin was too hot and my mom only packed a bag for one night.

After they broke up she told me about how her first partner touched her stomach in a way that made her sick. If I had known would I have stood in the door like a dog with haunches raised? I always say she told me after, but I was in my room five feet from hers the entire time and I did nothing. When was she not telling me? That time makes me think of alcohol wipes and the biting wind of a parking lot in Detroit. It was not a dirty time for me. She was on her hands and knees scrubbing them out of the carpet by herself. There was no mess because I never got in the way like I should have.

She bites her knuckles when she gets nervous. When I got out of the hospital there was no skin on her fingers. Every time I hear a noise come from her room I think of the worst things. The worst things. The worst things. I think we are both waiting to be back in the hospital rooms with the smell of hand lotion and urine. I jump every time I hear something hit a wall. I jump every time, hit a wall.

She ran away one day like I knew one of us would. My dad touched the back of my neck and whispered in my ear. She was sitting in her friend's front yard when mom found her. I knew one of us would. On the drive home she drives seventy

at the median. She is the thing that makes this house a home.
Make this house a home. When I cannot find her I panic.
When I cannot find her, I cannot find her

Ten girls to a shower

The first day practice was ever canceled was cuz Renate vomited in the pool. Coach was prowling alongside her yelling to put her goddamn head in the water. She inhaled so much of that shit on her flip turns that day her girls made her snort baby powder to dry out her head. Her bloodshot chlorine eyes and sniffing didn't do much to sooth the rumors that she did lines in the bathroom during class. Everyone knew nobody had the money for that but rumors were bitten nails at that school. Rena was one of those girls you could put in one side of a maze and you'd blink and she'd be out on the other side, not knowing how she did it cuz all the possible escape routes were erased. Her boyfriend's baseball friends took her math homework and she did it again. He called her a bitch behind her back cuz he was the only one who'd had a girl for over six months and he didn't want word getting out that he was soft. Somewhere there's a tally going of how many times Rena gets called that and the hash marks make the grooves in her skin. He had the best arm in the league, pitching balls that winked in and out of the air like magic.

Stevie had to get to her father's orchestra concert from the school with her hair wet. She stood at the bus stop wishing Rena had spit her stomach acid before she'd gotten in the pool. Her father was a music teacher at the college in town and that night he was gonna get an award for making do with the shittiest resources. Stevie couldn't identify a bass clef if it was her grandmother's own maiden name. She saw her father take home trumpets covered in cobwebs and get em greased by morning. She was nervous to see her father on stage again, with his hands that hold sound like a fistfull of sand, that make her blush from the shame of knowing nothing about this breathing orchestra he's the lungs of. The

bows all pressing up at once and tilting and resting. When she goes to her father's concerts she feels like a pitbull on a chain in the sandy backyard that can't grow grass. She feels like she is gonna step on one of the instrumentalists. Her fingers swell and they take up seats of their own.

The bus was pretty empty cuz 6:00 shifts hadn't left work yet but all the students had found somewhere to go. The ground was trampled with salt water marks from melting snow and Stevie looked it over instead of the stubbly man sleeping through his second loop round. She didn't like riding the bus when it was dark cuz the lights made the windows reflective and there isn't anything lonelier than witnessing your floating body zooming through people on the sidewalk who don't even know you're alive and kicking. The college was a mile from the bus station through streets of steaming underground laundromats. She could see the white t-shirted workers through open windows near her shoes that belched heat. Houses crept up right to the sidewalk with doors that slunk back inside, every living bit happening a half floor above the street to keep its feet dry from the stink of it.

Stevie had to go through a back entrance to the music school, one with no walkway but a sliver of earthquake-cracked concrete between the brick wall of the school and a chain link fence. She was the only person in the practice room who did not deserve to be there. A lanky girl in sandals and calf high socks tuned her violin with raw fingertips. She set her instrument down and sat on the nearest chair, her right cheek resting on the knee she held pressed to her chest, reading her sheet music off a practice stand. Another girl touched her shoulder and squatted down next to her, lips close enough to her skin that Stevie flushed and snapped her head away. They were a year older than her and there was no way for them to know they were older at all. Stevie had kissed girls in bathrooms at parties, one hand resting gently on the girl's waist whose sloppy arms were flung over her

neck. She always left first and Stevie waited in the room alone for twenty minutes until she was sure no one had seen them leave together.

In the concert hall the audience quieted to a hum while the musicians filed onstage. The crowd sat in their plush seats grossly like a skipped meal. When Stevie saw the violin girl sittin first chair, now in a shortish black dress that only covered half her thighs, she got up and left the room. She sat in the bathroom stall with her head in her hands and would not think about her would not think about her would not think about her. Her brain grabbed a fistful of her collar and tightened around her throat. She could not let her into her brain, that legless dragging body that leaves a trail of slime. The one that sees a leg and thinks grip, sees hair and thinks pull.

The bathroom windows were stretching their edges towards the crease between the ceiling and the wall, showing a bit of their stomach. The architect was probably living in a penthouse apartment across the street with a telescope. The concert was over and she wanted to warn the woman that were zipping in the door that someone was peeping. The man and his squeaky clean hands that probably felt coated in baby powder. Something inside her lungs grabbed up at her throat with a bazillion tiny hands and she coughed. When she opened the door there were six women at the sinks and eight standing against the wall. All their eyes and lips and noses and mouths. She wasn't supposed to be there, no she was not; the women bared their teeth. Why were they eyeballing her and not this windowsill prowler? She could swear water seeped from under the walls.

The orchestra was in the hallway shaking hands and smiling for photos as if nothing was going on. They didn't know anything about the pipe that musta burst inside the walls. Moving through the hoard of people was like trying to swim in a silo. A heavy dizziness pressed its fists into her eyes until

she could only see bright dots of light that wouldn't let the ground stay put. She walked the way a line on a spinning plate does. The fists pressed harder into her head and she searched blindly for her hands to make sure she wasn't the one doing it. Then her body and the floor met like it was an ex-boyfriend. Her ears insulted her as she fell back onto her ass.

The musicians and their families turned around to look at her. Some people knelt down next to her when she didn't get on her feet again real quick. There was a man and his face was real close to her so Stevie slid herself backwards on the floor away from him with her foot. "Hey, are you alright?" Someone asked.

"Yeah, I'm alright, ha I musta tripped over myself," Stevie started to get into a squat with help from a chick, but the knuckles socked her in the eye.

She heard someone not even bother to whisper that she was fucked up. Someone else slapped them lightly on the shoulder. There were two people with their hands all over her, pulling her to her feet. "Damn I'm embarrassed, I'm so sorry, thanks," Stevie said, sitting her sore self in some chair somebody grabbed.

Someone who said they were a med student watched her eyes do suicides in her skull. She was too busy watching her dad push through the crowd to pick her up like a kid from soccer practice. This is how they know. She couldn't even stand on her own two God given legs. She imagined the girls at the front row writing a note and passing it back through the crowd to the violin girl. You can tell she wants you by how fast she got on the ground. She wondered if the bathroom had flooded yet. If the architect was watching the girls float up like spiders.

Coach told em to do 20 in 10 or he'd make their skin into a

throw rug so the girls swam like they were being chased by sharks. Stevie was not one of the kids who learned to swim when their dad threw em in the pool. She didn't even know how until middle school when she was required to learn for gym class. The other kids didn't go on the short end of the pool where she was corralled cuz they didn't want people thinkin their parents never taught em anything. At the deep end those kids were always hanging over something so dangerous and yet they didn't giving two fucks. Avery Parker, the team captain, was one of those kids and it made Stevie hate her. She always wanted to pull a giant plug and have the water drain fast so they would fall eight feet and break something like a collarbone.

Parker was friends with this chick Monica Zeka back then and there was a rumor that Monica had been Parker's first. When they passed each other at school, the hall spread its skin thin over their history. Parker had made friends with the boys on the basketball team, benching what they benched at the gym, going out with them to set shit on fire in the woods on Sundays. Monica tried to tag along but she was scared of those boys who were always spitting into the dead leaves. They stopped being friends one day after Parker had pushed Monica to jump off a small cliff into the shallow river in the woods. Monica jammed her legs into the bottom of the riverbed so hard the marks are still probably there. Parker told everybody that she had come outta the muddy water an inch and a half shorter than before. Monica was always right on Parker's ass at practice, driven by some evolutionary adaptation that blocked any signals from her brain that told her to slow down. Parker timed twenty-five meters in seventeen seconds, Monica nineteen.

Sometimes Stevie swam twice or three times a day. The team had morning practice at five o'clock A.M. which required waking up at four in order to walk to the school. The building was on a steep upward hill but it still sat semi

flat with its basketball courts cutting into the ground like a stolen piece of cake. When girls played pickup games out there all the cars passing by watched as high school boys lined the fence whooping like animals. The streets were dark in the winter and Stevie carried a box cutter in her hoodie pocket. When she caught Heloisa the team nark eyeballing it poking outta her coat, the blood in her heart sat down. Their school was tough on weapons cuz a kid brought a gun into the cafeteria the year before and right after that some other kid curb stomped his own cousin over some family shit. “You say anything to anyone and I’ll tell your boy what we did last Friday night,” Stevie said as she passed her on the way out.

“You fucking cunt.”

The girls moved like syrup in the locker rooms at 5 AM; girls who somehow split their sleep to be in that wet floored room. All of em with no past but what had gotten their ass to practice. In the showers their skin was bruised and goosebumped and no one stared cuz that shit didn’t exist unless it happened in the pool. They had afternoon practice, too, and sometimes when she had too much energy Stevie would go to the YMCA and sneak in to use the lap lanes. That week she swam so much her skin was starting to crack and when she breathed in her lungs rattled with the water she’d sucked up.

At afternoon practice on Thursday she swore the bottom part of her lungs were pinched closed with a rubberband. The only bit of them she could get to fill up was the very top of her chest from her throat to her nipples. She did the first ten laps behind the other girls, panicking like she was in middle school again with the water touching her on all sides. She ran into the back wall and rested with her chin in the grate, her lungs lighting up a neon strip of muscle in her left shoulder each time she wheezed. “RP whatchu you doin,” Coach

hollered at her. He called her by her initials cuz he called the rest of the girls by their last names but Ramella-Parnas was had to say quick.

Rena ducked under the lane divider and held Stevie's weight so she could rest. Stevie closed her eyes and nodded her appreciation. She was still trying to catch the breath that only seemed to make it down her neck before getting caught up and turning back like there was bad traffic. Coach came over and told her to take deep breaths and calm down cuz she was just freaking out, but when she breathed deep a bunch of very small somethings popped inside her like she was stepping on pomegranate seeds. Coach and Rena got Stevie outta the pool and the water shut its loud mouth as the rest of the girls got out to sit on the side in solidarity. Rena wrapped Stevie up in her towel saying, "my mom once broke her arm so bad she couldn't breathe. The doctors told her to breathe in for three, hold for four, out for five. I don't know it seemed to help her."

Water dripped onto the bench where the other girls sat across the pool and made a string of lagoons. None of em watched while Stevie was set on a stretcher, averting their eyes like they were taught as kids. Heloisa bit her lip and looked hard into the pile of her hands in her lap. The assistant coach told em to shower and get to class. Rena had to use Stevie's towel to dry off.

A nurse helped Stevie take off her swimsuit and dry off in one of the urgent care rooms while Coach called her mother. They somehow did the whole thing with her only standing up from the bed once. The nurse apologized every time she touched Stevie's bare skin which didn't seem right at all. When she walked in the door of the hospital she had expected to hand over her body and there she was trying to pass it right back. Her mom got there while they were x-raying her lungs. She didn't know if it was her mind or

what but every time the machine beeped she swore the water inside her pulsed and tightened its grip for a moment.

The x-ray technician told her and her mother what was wrong when she was laying down again in some corner of the hospital that looked like it was closing up for the night. Stevie watched his hands holding the x-ray photo full of bright spots. They did not stutter. “Bacterial pneumonia complications have caused the fluid to spread into the pleural area surrounding the lungs, blah blah blah,” Her mother bit her fingernails and sat in silence beside her bed for a couple of minutes that she learned later was around three hours. They put marks on her in a black pen. They said once a surgeon operated on the wrong lung and now they gotta mark the patient every time. Stevie thought about the doctor standing over some body with a whole healthy lung beside him on his tray, realizing that it was the wrong lung. Then it was a chest completely empty and looking like a recipe box made in woodshop for mother’s day. The body sitting up and feeling so light without its organ that understands how to handle air. The anesthesia they used smelled like the air inside a beach ball.

When she woke up there was a tube sticking out from her skin the way nothing ever should. It was the type of thing that if anything ever sticks out of your body like that you’re in serious trouble. She looked at it through the neck of her hospital gown. She poked it and felt it squatting between her ribs, rubbing against the bones like a man cuddling the dog he kicked.

Heloisa took the bus to the hospital after practice the next day and walked inside with her hair frozen. She didn’t know which floor Stevie was staying on so she looked at the map with parts of it unmarked like they didn’t wanna talk about what was in there. Someone asked her if she needed help and she imagined what she must’ve looked like with her hair dripping on the floor. The elevator stopped on the third floor

to let on a nurse pushing a boy in a wheelchair whose body was folded in on itself in pain. She turned her face to the wall so that she couldn't stare at him until his face turned into someone else's. She told herself she was being haunted by the image of her boyfriend dissolving in that chair, but she wasn't trekking to his hospital room and that wasn't the image coming to her. She got off at the fifth floor and took the next elevator right back down.

Early in the morning the nurse took Stevie's vitals real quiet to allow her mother her sleep. Stevie did not want to wake up anymore to the smell of heavy duty cleaners and infection. She had no way of knowing that the rest of the rooms in the hospital weren't just full of vines crawling over the beds and heart monitors. Plants holding the doors shut and crawling down people's throats.

Stevie's body spit up the pneumonia like a child at the spelling bee. It helped the pain to hold her body still, not let it shake when she coughed. Her body got better as fast as it got sick. They didn't do any more surgery to take the tube out, they said that the pressure of the organs pressing in would close the hole up by itself. So a nurse put his clean hand on her shoulder and tore the tube out of her chest like he was gutting a fish in an industrial butcher warehouse. For a second Stevie didn't know what to do with the pain and she didn't scream and she didn't cry she just rolled over and pressed hard on her body to make sure it didn't come right apart.

Parker showed up to morning practice the day Stevie was supposed to get back in the water with her hair shaved close to her head in patches. Stevie could not look at her without seeing the handfuls of black spongy hair on the floor of her bathroom where her shaking hands held the razor. She pictured Parker's hair in a ponytail, the knife she carries on her slicing it off in her hands, the hair going limp like a dead

rodent. No one talked to her in the locker room. Her scabbed head made the walls spit out the fact it had been holding in its mouth, that their bodies were not secrets there.

The tile of the shower was so gross the girls wore flip flops to avoid the impetigo that slept in the grout. Five girls could shower on each wall, their bodies moving slowly from fatigue. Stevie's muscles had forgotten how to hold a body after over a week in bed. She watched Parker wash the chlorine off her head with quick hands like a boy shaking rain outta his hair. That girl knew the cut made her jaw look stronger and she held Stevie's eye contact until she licked water off her lips and Stevie turned away fast. That girl could shave her head bald, she could make the walls scream, but she was not gonna push Stevie against a wall until she said uncle. She would not fucking look at her again.

At the other end of the showers there was angry whispering. Monika was still in her swimsuit, talking angrily to her clique with a cracking voice. They held eye contact with Parker like a double dutch rope. "You got something to say to me?" Parker hollered at her knowing damn well she was what they were talking about.

The water hiked down the drain in the center. The early morning light filtered through a high, dead bug encrusted window. Stevie broke her promise, turning around to check on Parker despite the shame that smacked her when she did. Everyone but her was eyeballing Monica so Stevie turned real fast to look in the same direction. "Yeah, bitch I got something to say."

"Fucking say it then," Parker walked toward her, the muscles in her legs flexing. Her fingers full of the same potential energy that snapped the lighter on every day in the woods.

"Was sayin I didn't wanna get naked with you in here, I ain't gonna be what you to go home and jerk off to,"

“I don’t think you have anything to worry about, babe,” Parker was standing above her.

“You know we got boy’s locker rooms for dykes like you,”

Parker shoved Monica backwards, pushing her in the chest with big flat palmed punches, “dykes like me? Huh?”

“Get your hands off me, you slut,” Monica screamed uncontrollably, pushing her back harder in the ribs. She was terrified by Parker, how she always knew where to go. That girl wanted to spit so she spit. Monica had slammed her hands right below Parker’s breasts, not wanting to touch her. She shoved with her legs, feeling the skin of her old friend’s stomach for the only time in their whole relationship.

Parker stepped backwards and slipped, her head snapping on the shower floor. Her blood spread thin fingers through the running water and Stevie screamed at the sight of it. Her ribs seized and she could not fill her lungs with more than a thin coating of air again. Three girls were on the ground holding the back of Parker’s head, sitting her up in the pool near the choking drain. Monica slipped down the wall until she was sitting with her palms pressed to the floor. The water kept running, washing over her eyes so she had to close them and no one thought to turn it off.

In class she was so unable to focus on math it made her open her mouth in a wet, toothless, silent scream. The teacher wrote an integral on the board and told them to do the next couple of steps. She could not get her fractions to come out right, looking at the numbers too fast, trusting her brain to treat em well. She blocked her peripheral vision with her hands cuz the people around her were moving so regularly she thought they were reacting to a dog whistle telling em to come, sit. Every time she looked up at the answer on the board she begged God, but every time she was erasing and starting over. Maybe her brain was not trustworthy at all? She ripped right through her paper,

erasing. The bell didn't ring, but she was in the stairwell of her school being roughed up by shoulders anyway. All her instructors were told about the incident on the swim team and Stevie hated showing up to class as the representative of it. When she spoke she was responding to that shove in the stomach, her tongue all coated in the dirt of that locker room. She was sure she could only be understood when she was in class with Heloisa or another swim team girl. She hated how much more comfortable she was even around Monica, knowing that someone else in the room had seen it happen and was trying to learn how to hold its weight safely. Sometimes her teachers would eye her and she would be so grateful she'd have to put her head down to sooth the heaviness of it. When they asked her how she was doing she felt guilty for worrying them so deeply. She didn't wanna be one of the kids that take up space in their brain, that made them go home tired and say nothing to their wives and go to bed on an empty stomach.

Stevie was excused to sit in the school's greenhouse a lot, where they experimented on bean plants that dropped down from the pipes in the ceiling. Some senior girl was in charge of taking regular care of the bed of reaching tendrils and she came in every fifth hour with her science notebook all filled with data charts. "What're you doing in here?" She asked Stevie after startling at her the Thursday she got back from a three day suspension.

The girl was assigned to take care of the greenhouse by her counselor as a responsibility that was supposed to get her 'back on track.' She had been caught skipping class to fuck in the locker rooms where no one went. She always called it fucking, not sex, not making love or any of those dumb terms straight people use in romcoms. She watered the roots while telling Stevie about the bars she went to where people drank so much they'd end up accidently inviting sixteen year olds into their beds. "I had a friend who that happened to. I told

her to call the police on his ass, but she said she loved him,” the girl told her and then that she went by Raleigh at school.

Stevie didn't know whether or not to believe her sometimes, but they got close fast. She liked this friend who didn't even know she was a part of the team, one of the girls to keep an eye out for. She came with Stevie to her one month check up at the hospital cuz she was eighteen and could sign the papers saying Stevie was okay. Her mom was on a business trip and Stevie didn't wanna bug her with it again. To celebrate they drank Stevie's mom's wine in their apartment, Stevie surprised by the fact that she could be more confused than she already was. Raleigh kissed like a ghost would, like she missed it something awful. She was moving too hungrily and her hands were under Stevie's shirt. Stevie's body flinched away from them, expecting them to pull her bones out, causing her flesh to cave into the empty space. She told her to stop and she stopped and stood up embarrassed as hell. “Sorry, sorry I don't know what I was thinking,”

Raleigh left a couple hours later after watching a kung fu movie on tv. Stevie wondered if the doctors had made a mistake and taken both her lungs out. She checked to see if there were pen marks on her still and when there weren't she found a pen and made them herself. She tried to cut on her mark with her box cutter. The gash lay on her stomach burping blood. It did not feel the same at all. In one sudden and breathtaking instant Stevie knew she would never feel that feeling ever again and forget how to swallow. She'd never be able to use her own hands to make her shoulders split like a zipper when she breathed, hold a weight large enough on her chest to make her gasp the way she did at the hospital. Even if she slit a tunnel down to her stomach and spilled the acid all over the floor she wouldn't be able to trade the pain for a mended patch on Parker's head. Her ribs were nothing but healing, stuttering away from the ghost girl out of habit. They were going to mend up so good there wouldn't even

be a scar in a coupla years and then what was she gonna do about the wet tile floor paving her brain? There wouldn't be any water in her lungs to justify the fact that they never turned the tap off.

Julia Bohm

Out West (For the Sister)

By now, I know the snap of my own heartbeat -- can't
tell if it's praise or not, still I

refuse to forgive it.

There are places in me that you would not recognize.

Whole rooms boarded up,

doors that refuse to close all the way.

I wanted a body but instead built only the knees: in order to
pray, or maybe beg. I would not try again. This house, this
cadaver is still mine, belonging to me,

the first thing I ever had.

It is so easy to hand myself over to you: sister.
Here, have this,

I do not need it. Or else, it seems ugly when
you're around.

This is where we must end up.

Find another ending and still I will not love you.

My mind, like ocean, like river: surging; and
I cannot rid myself of it.

We either tread water or we drown. How
boring.

It's the same old story, same chattering teeth. The
ground is on fire so we hide

in the water nearby and wait for it to pass so the story
can continue, or else; the water is the whole story: all waves,
and sharks, and us. Floating.

Too many times I have found myself between your jaws.

I say, it will not happen again. This is the mountain I
keep climbing. What a solid thing:

to be always at the base of your love, looking
up.

In Gallup Park, they burn the grass when it gets too tall,
create their own sort of wasteland; like you: Scorching those
things reaching out of the place you gave them.

Let's make a map.

Here, the forest, the decaying church, the
abandoned
cities.

The desert, the badlands, the dry and hungry places --
there is refuge there. It's a trick, you see, no one expected to
find safety in landscapes that are dying.

To the left, a graveyard; my grandfather again.
Consider the effects of trauma.

Not a ripple, more of an echo. My sorrow, a wordless
salute.

Either tread water or drown. Same
words; same voice, begging you, sister.

We grew from the dirt but now the land is barren.
Quiet. The wind whips around.

We are no longer worth something. Out here,
every ghost town reminds me of myself.

Out West,

every ghost town reminds me of myself, Grandpa.
I did not want to carry you the way I have been, but
it is so easy love someone else's hurt, resign to my post
as watchman for your life. I tried resentment and still
got stuck to you. How long did you spend in the mouth
of someone else, between the teeth of those who
entered your home without permission? And did the teeth
feel like shark or human? Did they swallow you then
choke you back up the same way they did with your
God? If I have your blood, then I also feel the teeth.
I do not owe you anything. This rotten inheritance,
the decay, this siphoning of sorrow into me, is
swelling. I do not want it. Don't hand yourself
over anymore. You have your dirt, your body, your
coffin. Still, you possess me, like ghost without
the haunt. Quiet. The wind whips around.
I do not owe you anything.

Out West, Sister

To the left, a graveyard; my grandfather again.
My sorrow, wordless. But still mine. Sister,
you cannot have it. You do not know these
places. I inherited you & owe you nothing.
Consider the effects of trauma: two girls.
You & me. Floating. I got Grandpa's eyes
& all the echoes of what happened to him:
Train. Bodies. Brother. Hurt makes
people close, roots things together. I know
it is in our blood, sister. There are generations we
cannot undo. My tongue belongs to this dead
man who I knew so little of when he lived.
My sorrow, rooted in me.
Consider the years it took to grow like that,
only to end up in this body. I feed it.
It is not yours, sister. I have no debt
with you. There are places in me you would
not recognize. You do not know this kind
of grief; this attempt to mourn my heart,
even though it's still pounding.
I do not know what to do with it. But
sister, I cannot help the suck of breath into
my lungs. Let's say love -- like a river,
consumed me. Or assume it was a river. Assume
I lost just as much oxygen as you. You cannot
have the river. It's mine, you see. Don't
you understand? Love too, can be an act of violence.

Lionel Robert

Dear Mother Earth,

There was indeed once a time when mankind thought you were the center of the universe. A time when man thought of you as a mere hollow shell, a temporary resting place for men to live until their inevitable death and descend into the Great Beyond. This was the era of which, religion was the dominant force among men, with no other explanation, mankind was forced to see themselves as the privileged children of some unseen deity, who insists on resting in eternal solitude from his creation.

Mankind was forced to see you as a mere toy for his use, a fixed body that rests, statically, as all the other planets orbit it's greatness. It was only recently, thanks to the light of Science, and reasonable logic, when it was discovered that you were a mere body of rock and metal, orbiting just another average Star, in infinite space as a speck of dust. It was learned that the you were not the master of the universe, but you were instead the Sun's master, and the Sun's master was the galaxy, and the galaxy's master was the universe, and as it was thought, the universe's master was a supreme god, who for reasons unknown, decided to create an everlasting universe likely filled with trillions of planets and stars and black holes... all for the amusement of us humans. My, what a coincidence.

It wasn't until very recently, we discovered dear mother, that it was you who we owed our life too. It was you who birthed us, and was generous enough to allow us into your heart, to invade your lands, to strip you of your freedom, your animals, your trees, your fruit. In thanks to your generous offerings, we decimated you. We poisoned you, we threw our trash onto you, we washed your lands with our

own blood and filled your rivers with vile mess and dead fish.

Yet you continue to renew yourself, every Spring, for us. You continue to be reborn once more and welcome your children back as you open your arms and extend your lands, beckoning to your children that they were yours.

It is with this, I thank you dear mother Earth, our true mother. Our true master, for being our mother. Against the impossible odds, against the impossible situations, you prevailed. You allowed life to live, and you allowed them to evolve.

The saddest day in human history will be when we are inevitably forced to leave you, dear mother, and explore what you have been preparing us for all along, to explore the Great Cosmos, that continues to beckon us, your own mother.

But trust that we will never forget you, dear mother, as you will always remain in our memories and hearts, as the one true mother of the human race.

With love, a fellow human being

Loewe Denken Wir

A Letter To The People I Convinced Myself Of

Part I: The materials we share

I find myself telling the same story a lot. I think this is how we gathered the world. We created one story and told it over and over and over until there was an understanding of the story which is drastically wrong.

There is someone who I do not know who is the embodiment of everything. Her name is Gobekli Tepe. She is the story that we are telling, or at least what we have of it at that time. She is the person who takes a part of every life we are given and makes it her own. It is not a selfish thing, it is just what happens.

Gobekli was born alongside the death of a boy whose coffin belonged to Ibrahim: the man who received a part of everyone before Gobekli. You see, when this boy died Ibrahim took the action of his death. They both died, but only one could claim it as his own.

Of course the world could not exist without someone to give parts of ourselves to, someone to make sure that no one has an unshared life, even if just for a second, everyone gives something. Thus when Ibrahim died, Gobekli Tepe was born.

She was born to a mother who never loved her. They say that sometimes a woman hurts so much in childbirth that when she sees the baby she cannot see any further than how it does not look like her. What more do you expect from a mother whose first child was born, stealing the title to her own birth? The baby ripped her apart. The baby. The baby ripped. The birth was only pain. There is no intimacy in darkness and Gobekli stole the light of birth that is the

ownership of giving a child life. The unconditional, selfish love of a child who you created which is supposed to throb. This love which is supposed to be a wound. Not the blood slipping out, a limited thing, dirtying the room.

She sat with Gobekli in her arms. She hadn't thought of a name. She did not care, this child belonged to itself. It was a singular thing. It was not her name to give.

When a person is born now it is because Gobekli Teppe is still alive. It used to be because Ibrahim lived, Adnaan lived, Ishmael lived.. Now she breathes in and there is a child born named breath. She breathes out and there is a child named exhale. She breathes and there is a child named lung. Throat. Muscle. Heart. Brain. Contract. Shy. Contract. Grimace. Etc. Etc. Etc.

The action belongs to Gobekli Teppe, while the rest of their body is the person's. Each day there are a thousand seconds where Gobekli takes control, for a moment, of their body, but there are more moments which are not hers. When Breath breathes in she is there. But in these moments she is present without whatever sentiment is carried through the context of Breath's life. The thing about being made up of other people is that you are only action, each second for her has no context. Breath takes in their partner's perfume and it is a blushing inhale, shortened, quick. It is Gobekli's breath but it is not her love. Breath doesn't even notice the fact their lungs are controlled by her at the beginning of each sentence. Sometimes owning a house is less important than owning what lives there, what haunts there.

On the other hand there is a time where one of us dies and Gobekli forgets a part of her life. There is some sort of spiteful control in this. With death we take something of her's back, or if not back, at least away. A person whose moment was when she stepped a little too far off a sidewalk and for a second her ankle cocked the wrong way, or more, too far in the right way and it hurt. Here lies: A Mistake.

Part II: The things in between what happens and what doesn't

Gobekli Teppe doesn't know that our entire life is spent learning her story. We don't either. We are told what has happened to some people when we meet them and get close and love. Part of everyone's existence is Gobekli's story, not all of it. Sometimes just one part. When we meet them we also meet the part which is not them, Gobekli's part. There is often no way for you to know which part is her's. My family is made up of seven lives and seven moments from these lives are sections of one, entirely different, life. I am wondering when the Death of Gobekli Teppe will be born. Will they know when they are born that the moment they die they will go to the grave in Gobekli's coffin? What will they look like?

Unfortunately there are some people who hold an important part in the understanding of Gobekli Teppe's story but are not particularly interesting. They're the people who hold the main character's hand when they are just in their car going to the next location where things happen or don't. My father was this. He was five minutes when Gobekli washed dishes and was afraid to look out the darkened window. He was an anxiety ending with turning away from the outside wall. I know this because I asked and he told me that this was the heaviest moment of his life. He was a house painter and he had a few other parts of his life. He was married, he was born, he had cancer, he successfully fell asleep, there was probably a childhood thrown in there somewhere, and one time he prayed. In no way is the moment of the dishes the only part of him but that is the part of him that is not his.

My mother was not nothing but she wasn't something big like a first kiss or a hug from her grandmother. She was the point in time when Gobekli Teppe was allowed to cross the street. My father loved her for her safe excitement, the white lights shining through a body loping across from where

you are. I watch them get up in the morning and convince themselves they are in love. My mother writes names of things he uses up on the list for the market. My father looks where she laid when he is awake. Sometimes they think about the last time the other one had touched the same door knob. How many seconds were in between when their bodies were in a similar place. The problem with us is that we were not meant to live together. There is nothing about us that insists our connection. What is it about us that craves being of another person? They sleep in the same bed and touch each others faces when they're bold and feet by accident under the blanket. They figure there was a point when love was not something uncomfortable and unbecoming. It was never beautiful though. It is a fumbling fingered chef, these hearts. They have only ever knocked together and on those days we are a family. I stand by the sink and my mother sits at the table and my father is standing in the doorway and we have forgotten what we are doing and I am looking to my father for what he wants me to do because he was about to ask a favor but he stopped and he forgot how to look at my mother with surprise but he now looks to her in order to remember what he needed done and she is not looking at any of the floor tiles at once but as a covering and this is how she sees him now. He is a blurring and she is still a momentary light. If they were in love for more than a spark it would be a lasting oil. A miracle of eight days. Imagine a lifetime with someone condensed into eight days of shocking love.

There are times where one of us turns on the faucet to remind us that we still can. This is how we love, as a reminder of something we are not capable of doing all at once or for long periods of time. At night she walks into my room, kisses my head and says I love you and then she sleeps for the effort of it. Pulls back the covers, slips her trained leg under the water of sheets and is, for a second, grateful for how it holds her more than any other thing. Tell me, how is

this not what we are made of? That disgusting, overpowering, loneliness of being in bed alone and enjoying it more than anything.

Part III: A greed born thing

They gave birth to me and I was given a darkened thing, something passed on by a recent aging. Someone died for me to be born, or at least for this to be passed on to me. Each action needs a beneficiary. When someone died I was there to snatch it out of the grave. The person before me had learned the darkened thing and mastered living with it as much as you can learn something that is not yours. It was given to me as the part of my life that belonged to Gobekli Tepe, most likely the person who died for me held this disgusting beast for Ibrahim. These parts are intended to last less than an hour, a glance, a sneeze, but mine was a dragging thing. It ended up married and divorced from everything I have done once it was renamed A Past Event. I was raped and it was Gobekli Tepe's. She was raped and I was keeper of that story. I was that story. I am an ugly child born of fear and a cracking pavement. I was given this story and every time I am asked I have to tell people how it happened. Do you know what it's like? Retelling the same story over and over and being nothing more?

We all live around one person. She is a giant to us. I hate Gobekli Tepe more than any other person. She has stolen the importance of everything in my life. I am not even the recovery. When did a lifelong trauma include recovery? Since when did action include the muscles' release? We are not Gobekli Tepe, I think, we are what she doesn't know. When we tell each other these parts of our lives I think that there is something in her that moves. My biggest fear is that Gobekli Tepe will meet me and ask me what happened. How can I tell her that? Each time I let it out it drags itself across someone else's doorstep. It lays in someone else's bathtub, it

drips off their bed and they can not make it so you can not ignore it under the covers. No.

It is something you do not know how to feel. It is something that happened and now you are done with it but it is not done until everything of yours belongs to it. It is a greed born beast.

No.

Listen, it was not at night. Listen, it was not one time. Listen, it hurt but not badly. Listen, we bled but only enough that it seemed normal. Listen, the person who raped you doesn't remember, no, they never even noticed. Listen, it was not a crushing thing until after.

This. This is the crushing thing. Being born to tell this. It is not something I tell to each part. There are only a few of us who need to know, but a few means telling more than one person each day. It means explaining in order to allow their section of Gobekli Teppé's life to be fully hers. It is like a stranger telling you not to stare at people. You have no idea why they are telling you what to do with your body you are just doing it and in that moment your body is not yours.

I am not something people who know about Gobekli want to hear. My father said I poisoned his experience with Gobekli with the caution following my rape. He thinks that knowing how Gobekli would later live changes how he allowed her to experience his piece of her. He thinks the dishes will never be clean, the darkened window will always be there. The problem with this set-up is that I have to tell my family about what happened for myself, but is that irresponsible to Gobekli? I don't know how when I have my own child, who will be the ache of Gobekli Teppé's back after work, should take what I have to give. But I am the rape. I am the horrible part. I am what seems like a lie: the not-everyone-believes-I-exist, why should they? When I tell the people who give one part of themselves to Gobekli

each lifetime, I can not explain how I give all of myself past the certain point of my rape. Gobekli owns all the oil resting above this line of water. I am the whole saucer holding these parts but there are two distinct names attached to each. This was once my body. How do I explain a nerveless body to an ache of a child? Remember we were born to be separate.

It takes a lot for me to keep in mind that to each person I meet this is a new thing. They have never heard the story that I don't know if I am allowed to tell. Sometimes I will tell someone who is drinking a bowl of soup that they must do it with their eyes down but not closed so they can feel the heat rise against the curve of their eyes but not see anything other than the dark of the bowl. They will look up at me and I will tell them, "no. this is how she would do it." You see they always forget the sagging guilt.

It is odd because more strangers follow my direction without questioning than ask about it. Of course to the people who ask why I am telling them how to live, I must give, because otherwise the situation will be spiked with confusion, which would not, I think, be how Gobekli Teppe would experience it. There are times when I realized that I forgot to lace my part into an experience because I didn't realize it was her's until I got home and saw something that reminded me of her. Other times I realize as I am speaking that I was wrong and the person is simply living of their own accord. When I make a mistake I back away like my credit card was rejected.

Occasionally I am mad. There is someone out there that is two parts recovery and one part rape, if we met would we know? Are they a beaten rug hanging in the rain too? A cord snapping under the weight of someone else's life? How can they recover from someone else's rape? Do they have their own rape from which their recovery is secondary to Gobekli's? Or are there parts of recovery which resemble a

physical ailment and they are a sick child? Are they a burn victim? A war veteran? Is recovery worth it? Does she let go? Did my rape, create the need for a revival? Is it momentary? Does it end for anyone? Dear god tell me one of us gets better.

There are people who are only her's for a split second. I want to know what it is to be one part of her life instead of waking up each morning in her sheets. I am here in the kitchen, waiting for my father to tell me what to do, and he is empty. He is empty, he has no directions for me.

Part IV: What is hers

I think the first thing that wasn't mine were the streetlights. I walked beneath them and the fact they laid this watch over my shoulders gave me no protection.

It is a certain thing, finding yourself sneaking out to see someone. You must avoid the action of decision, and then you must do it. There is no planning. It just happens, and there is nothing else to it other than its action. You walk out your door and it is quiet. Leaving includes none of yourself, how else could you step through the knife of cold?

The first part of leaving your home at night is deciding to recreate everything that was familiar in day as not. When I close the back door the handle is cold because I am touching the world's side of my home's skin. I am clothed in things which were built for the measured breath of a home, without the wildness of dark. There are more spaces for there to be something I don't know than ever before with everything dark corners, my head is dangerously one-sided. I walked to the place I was supposed to meet my partner along the inside of the street because it was further from the tears between houses than the sidewalk. The entire time I walked the only thing I thought of was danger.

I am cutting across grass that knows no sun, which sleeps beneath the weight of my feet and then bends up to see what

disturbed them as I leave. When we met we pretended not to see each other until we were close, like an accident between strangers. We did not hold hands. There is no intimacy at night, but I was less afraid of the ripping neighborhood with them. I think fear is often associated with being the only person to see something. I am always afraid that I am making it up. If we were hit by a car we would both see it coming.

They lead me to their house. They opened the shell of their home, the inside that was not the world's side of the home's skin, but was still something cold to me. There is a point where you learn how to identify another person's scent, it is almost always when you enter their home. The flushed smell of thick, bare wood and leather cleaner was the last thing that was truly not touched by the rape. They were the last things whose memory doesn't twist with Gobekli's grip.

My partner joined me in sitting on their bed like you do when you first meet it. Gobekli sat down too and we inspected the room while they kissed our neck, while they pushed us towards the unfamiliar sheets, while they found the edges of our now unfamiliar clothes, dressed in new, short, breath. We didn't remove our body from the room. We did what you are supposed to do. We bent our fingers, we dug our nails, we bit, we burned, we ached, but we never wanted. There was a crucial moment we skipped. It was a certain thing, this sex, this meeting of skin and the world's skin. It was like screaming, something you do without meaning but every part of your body engaged. I have never been trapped between two things like a bed and a body since, I have never been more inside the chipping paint of the ceiling.

I was not afraid at the time. As it happened it was something I thought I understood. Now I walk past the point we met that night and there is nothing that tugs at my shirt or taps my shoulder, it is just grasscurbsidewalk and I am the only one who saw it.

All Char & Ash & Ember

Mrs. Vail say: I love this bug so much I gonna be it.

She wave her arms like a fucking idiot. But she can't even draw a bug. She can only draw half shell toast monsters with markers her daughter left like an elementary school boyfriend. (As soon as their song play).

Her boy say: why do we have to put on our coats

Mrs. Vail say: because we walk outside to avoid the big kids

Her boy say: I wanna walk with the big kids

She say: of course you do

Jaime smile at me because we both thinking about how Mrs. Vail know this boy's personality before she knows her own brain, probably around how she know Kafka or how to decline a target store card.

There are two worms on the board today one in lit and one in calc. I only for sure know that the calc one is Mrs. Sherman, Mrs. Vail might be a worm but for now it only in secret.

Thank god for the fact only one class today will include me listening to men talk.

I say: I wrote something

Zaphra say: I need to think about it

I think: you have your mother's laugh memorized?

Save that thought for later

Clara say: are you alone?

Jaime say: what do you want to call him Loewe?

I say: Mystery

because they gave me the ability to give title to the dog we all bursting over.

Momma say: I don't want to think about death right now. Drive careful my back hurts.

I am: in a church/restaurant where we all sitting under god's hands and hops like we all came for a supper n the windows

are painted. I watch our waitress scatter plates on tables with her careless hands.

I say: have a quiet night

She say: I love you

No löwe.

Can I help you?

Yes ma'am there's a dog in need of saving.

Clara say: he deserves it.

No Löwe.

There's a girl driving up in a Porsche

Look Löwe.

She the only gay woman in the room who I see out the corner of my eye over and over again an I act like they aren't pulling at their peg in the yard. She pushes her knuckles at dough like a drink offer and I watch her eyes never leave the counter, hands never leave the long wheat. It like a hiding place, this pizza. What a place for gay girls. The crust and cracks of the brick fire. All charred and ash and embers.

Maybe They Think The Smell Of Blood Is Theirs

There Will be Times Where I Miss You and I Can Do
Nothing

There is a woman on the track who runs with a bag under her arm. She does not seem scared but it might just be an angle. When she leaves the track I follow her to the locker room and she undresses from her gym clothes into pajamas which are crammed into a square and locked up with a string tied in a bow. I looks like if you opened her up there would be a balloon, an inconspicuous birthday. The way she trusts other women is not poetic, it is trusting and that is all. She leaves the building like she was never there. She slides down a staircase and the staircase is there until she comes back. The bag is under her arm like a toddler, a dog. I follow her to the staircase but at some point everyone notices a shape that moves like you do, I act as though I am grabbing another towel which is not allowed. Maybe she will think I am evil.

I am wondering if she puts the bag down. She left it on a bench as she dressed but it was nearby and sat like a friend. Where I imagine eyes, I see them slide away from her folded body and its bare teathy legs. It seems like it would be unethical for her to put it in her car without strapping it in. It is odd how easily their relationship feels shameful. Like there was a point where the friend looked at the thighs, the varicose veins, forgot to strap itself in, the windshield, and now it cannot forgive her. Not since they've drifted or married other people aside from that friend, which was never the plan but was a possibility they did not talk about. I do not finish my exercise after she leaves and my brain doesn't have time to worry about it.

Walking to my car is cold and it would be a comment I make to someone if someone were with me like, "boy it sure

is cold” or maybe “this wind is a bitch.” It is not cold enough to actively seek out someone to discuss it with and I do not check the news at home for reports of cancellations. It is small talk cold, a thing people notice and say something about because listening to the wind rip at your clothing is strange and feels like weakness. I always measure how much I should complain by comparing the temperature to a situation I am trapped in. Today I would be fine if I had nowhere to be and alcove away from wind.

My car is an alcove I open with a key and is full of silent life. I am stopping at a light too suddenly and the red hurts my eyes because I didn't expect it. At night my brain is always so alert it never expects the things that happen, it is only ready for things that won't. I suppose it makes sense that everyone is preparing themselves for emergencies that won't happen, if we saw it coming it wouldn't be an emergency. Maybe the woman knows something we don't, her bag is preparation for the unpronounced evil of my mindless towel-snatching which will eventually be our pitfall.

At home, Avi seems to be waiting by the sink. I wonder why the water is on and how long it has been this way. “If you keep your damn hand in the freezer like that you'll get frostbite,” she says.

“Human things can't do that, we can't make things cold enough. Plus, who are you to talk, if your fingers are dipped in there much longer you'll start to shrivel,” I say.

I grab a bag of peas and practice carrying it around the room while the door to the freezer burps breath and light against her face. She does not move or dry her hand. At some point the peas start to drip and it becomes less realistic. All our spices are lying on the table and I wonder why we are so concerned about them getting wet. Finally we are standing in the kitchen and she gets up the nerve to ask me why I am home so late. The peas are in my left hand, hers is in the sink, the ankles of her pants move softly with the water. I tell her

that I went to the gym and I am wondering if the peas are cold enough to talk about. It is hurting my hand but not in a way that won't stop eventually. Maybe her bag was burlap full of barbed wire or thorns.

"I don't think it is good for you to lose more weight than you have."

"The plan is to build muscle."

"For that you would need to eat," she explains. The thought of food makes me think about how similar chewing is to vomiting. "I am not going to force you, but there is a point at which you cannot keep fighting your body this way."

I turn the knob and the water is off for the first time in a while. It is quiet and the water around our feet tugs, making us feel strange and weak. She asks me if I would like to shower and I say no and sit in the water. I both hate her and love her for dragging me to the bedroom. There are some things that we want that other people need to get us to do. For me it is movement. I hate the way my bones protest a system I cannot change by smashing together, Avi reminds me that I can change it. "Dorofei, I cannot continue this, your body is so light it is disgusting," she says undressing my wet clothing to skin.

"You are disgusted by me," I reply, eyes closed knowing its falsity on my tongue.

"You know I am not."

She kisses me lightly and it feels like what it is, the same skin she just unpacked, on another woman's skin who I know but have the ability to forget. A long time ago we decided not to have sex anymore and now I am wondering how she feels about this. Her fingers are unpleasantly upset by the sink. I cannot stop imagining her skin as the surface of the bag. I watch her fall asleep next to me and at some point her chest takes the bag's form which expands and contracts, at this point I turn away from her and wake up with her gone.

No. I don't know where she is. I thought she was with you?

I am walking behind the woman with the bag and you would think she would be more uncomfortable than she appears to be. This morning I woke up and our floor was not covered in water and it made me feel courageous. I parked my car in a direction I suspected she might live in but I was wrong and am now walking out of my way. I don't think she remembers who I am. Like the stairs, I am a face she would step on. I do not follow her all the way home because I feel more evil than with the towels and I am afraid that I might scare her. I don't know why I am curious. I realize that following her is not poetic but it is trusting, a bow tied around a locker. No, a bow tied around something uncontained and lurking. It is a gross thing. I turn my head downward and keep walking until I no longer see where she has gone. My clothes are cold even though I have an umbrella today. When I turn around rain whips my eyes with what they've seen. I do not go to the gym that day except to shower. I rub my feet on the tiles and try not to look at the floor or the corners. My hands know where to put the knobs but not how to keep a towel over my curves or lack thereof, don't know how to thicken the ability I have to have breasts out, itching thighs bare. Can the woman smell the queer trailing her when we walk, does she think I love her?

When I am home she is too. She is watching television, I am folding laundry, she is folding back covers, I am smoothing bedspreads, she is opening the fridge to eat, I am opening my fridge to put my head in and scream. The next time I see her I get dizzy because I am sure she knows I am evil and she will tell the people around her. She will tell them, "Oh boy, that one's a liar," or maybe, "that girl's a bitch." She looks me in the face and I am surprised by how close we get. Once she passes I turn around and say something but she assumes I am talking to someone else. I follow her to the track and my legs feel all strung the wrong way from burpees. She shuffles

on legs which know the grief of a lost husband, of children leaving, not picking up a phone, unfinished albums, a quiet creaking home. I move to the edge of the mat and my hands press against a cool floor which she does not feel. I slide backwards into a mock stretch and she passes me with her mouth closed eyes forward. I am distracted. It is strange when you lose sight of something as intricate as following someone's movements. It has become a habit of mine which I can continue to deal with while having my life exist separately from it like a family member or a pet.

My phone is buzzing near my hand and I look at it at the same time I am answering so I am not sure what voice to expect when one hits me. It is Avi. "Dorofei, your daughter called and needs to talk to you," she says.

"Okay," I hang up and do not call her because it is a rule that we only use landlines so we cannot move about while speaking. I am on the elevator to the first floor and I have not really exercised today, I do not know how long I stretched that way but my knees hurt. I walk out of the door and think I'm in my living room. There is blood lapping against the soles of my shoes, the most pleading ocean. A man moves me to the side gently and I look towards the area he moves me from. There is a woman on the ground who has fallen down the stairs. She was dead before her skull cracked but it still cracked unknowingly, the blood still drips with heat from a previous state. We are taking in its warmth. She had an aneurysm and let go of the railing, still clutching the bag. It is soaked through and I expect it to become see-through like water on white but it is just red. Later it will be brown. Avi is waiting near the sink at home probably. My daughter and her daughter expect to hear our voices. The bag is crushed under her weight and there are small pebbles slid half out of it, a rag. I suppose the thought of a woman cleaning a grave, placing pebbles on the edges, is easy for me because I have done it all my life but it is still crushing to me that no one

thinks to place one of the pebbles on those stairs that will be there even though she will not come back. Avi calls me again. No one knows who to call to tell about this, people only are calling us. It is strange to hear a silent gym and know there are still people upstairs who do not know, who are pushing themselves and maybe think the smell of blood is theirs. I cannot imagine cleaning it up, it is on my soles and ankles and the bottoms of my pants, my spines are tinted with it, Avi is sitting in it with her hands soaking. I am disgusted and I follow her body until we reach parts of deaths that I do not want to know about, then I lower my head until I am home and the water runs.

Never Intended To

My mother is home because
Smoke spits for her
spittoon of a smokestack

But the walk to her front door confuses me
Who knows what direction to approach a house
With no sidewalk so far from a road
A lawn yawning its name
A polite way to step on someone's grass

There are more lips to deliver off paper
Here I leave messages not-
Mine & never intended to be in these hands
& was that her who just walked by the window?

True he marked his height where his lashings whittled your spine?

after "Family," by Megan Falley

I hear that he carries a knife dull enough to only make a mark if the bone has already broke. Says he gotta be able to measure himself against anything, slide his initials through the walls of other people's houses. Says he against the wall already but clearly he doesn't know the tricks of architecture. Boy, you've never been up against anything.

There is a girl who was born in the skin she would always wear, I swear to you all she's ever been is stretched. She walks next to a 12 year old. I can't tell why they're here if not to test the rotting floor. Today I sat in class while she stood at the board. I knew four minds were on that knife in Trevor's pants pocket, and I am afraid of how my hands shimmered over the bottle opener in mine like if someone got there first I needed to be able to deliver my blow. Y tú löwe? Bruté Bruté Bruté. Whore. Takes his knife and sticks it in the wall while he fucks me, graffiti in the E hall bathroom just a slash like a cheekbone.

Boy writes a bill asking for death penalty. I wonder if he is getting ready to give it to the three kids in the audience who are afraid of the wallpaper. He holds a gun with pride, barrel chest knows barrel, point. If he broke open I'm certain there'd be wine aged like blood, brown. He don't know wall. Boys don't break against walls. They measure and leave their name pinned to it with the lining of his mouth.

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When Jaime was born they held their death inside of them
in a bag

They say it is not a strong thing, but it is, to unpack the bag
from a grocery store they came from

They are taking these things and setting them on the
counter

My great grandfather, I know, never had the health to
bring them out like this. Instead he took his arms and hit my
grandfather with an axe.

I think I picture him as Jack Nicholson but I also don't
see him living in a hotel. I see him pull the axe from their
woodpile and walk across a field he has tended to for so
long. I see the weight in his hand and in the silence he breaks
entering his own house. It feels to me that he carries the axe
as if to show it the things he had accomplished. Look at this,
this is my field, those are my crops, this is my barn, my grass,
my home, my door, the kitchen, stairs, boy, born, blood.

When Jaime's body decided it could no longer hold the
wrongfulness of itself, they were sixteen. That year I broke
up with my body while they fought for and against theirs.
It is a strange thing how they have to convince themselves to
stop gathering. My grandfather and grandmother offered
to come and help us while half of us were injured and the
laundry piled up in the room with their braid. I laid in bed
with cords wrapped around my wrists so if nothing more I
knew what it was to sleep with IVs instead of your girlfriend.
Their skin was the hottest wetland I've ever touched aside
from the shower. We did not call an ambulance to drive them
but I dressed them, my mother walked them out and drove

them, stopping rightfully at the blinking eyes of traffic. My grandfather was gone by then and I was staying in a home I don't want to remember, his hands still leaving their presence on my neck and cold came more from the bedroom door I shut guiltily than the weeping window. It is weird how everything manifested. We fought more subtly that year than any other. My older sister never visited her dying sibling. My mother ran at them in a car that held their childhood. My father ignored my frozen skull. Clara and I left while Nurses cleaned vomit off of Jaime. We talked about rollercoasters with our eyes turned in prayer towards the blinking graveyard. It is structured in circles like someone had to plan out the ways they would fill the graveyard beautifully so that airplanes would think to crash there if not to be another section of it's art. I fight my mother every night over whether I could sleep on the floor near them. She hands me a lukewarm cup of ice cream she had gotten for them an hour before they fell asleep and its weight scrolls over my skin deftly but unaffixed. I cannot bring myself to look into her eyes already blackened with curtains, protecting her loved ones from their own disabling grief. My grandmother never says it but when my mother married my father she became of the breed of people who are killed for their ability to take. No one wants to see a grieving person, what could you possibly give them?

My great grandfather walked slowly through the halls of our home. The ones he does not know, they are not his, he never healed here with the boy who was his own but here his blood tramples like an animal and it is wildly trying to escape wildly trying to be a veil, a reassuring blankness where we could start again if necessary.

Natalie Delph

13 Ways of Looking at a Boy

after "13 Ways of Looking at a Black Bird," by Wallace Stevens

I.

Among a mass of pimply teenagers
the only conscience thing
was your always ticking brain.

II.

I was stuck on you
like a broken record player
that only plays jazz.

III.

A boy shuffled against the winter
snow.

It was a large part of my unravelling

IV.

A boy and a girl
are one.

A boy a girl and a Chevy
are trouble.

V.

I do not know which to prefer,
the beauty of being alone
or the beauty of being alone with you,
the bats emerging from trees
or just after.

VI.

Shadows line up across the tennis court
with uncertain lines.

The shadow of this boy

runs back and forth,
my serves hopping the fence
past his racquet.

VII.

O tall boy of far away,
why do you lack such confidence?
Do you not see how the world bends at the tips
of your long fingers?

IX.

I know noble accents
and lucid inescapable rhythms;
but I know too
that a day without you
feels longer than a lifetime.

X.

At the sight of this boy
strumming an upright bass,
even the gods of jazz
would cry, "that shit is hot."

XI.

He rode shotgun along the road
by the river.

Once a fear pierced me,
in that I mistook his soft face
for someone entirely different.

XII.

Time is passing.
The future must be uncertain.

XIII.

It was summer all afternoon.
The sun was shining
and it was going to shine.
The boy and I sat at the bottom of a tall hill
and found comfort.

Housesitting

My neighbor's house always smells a little off when I housesit - like stale air and wet dog, but a little cleaner than all of that implies. They're clean people, every surface in their home dusted and scrubbed every other week by an expensive cleaning service. Their dog just died so the dog smell is nearly gone but it's been replaced by a faint newly dead dog smell. The husband just died too but it was too expensive to cancel the vacation so they went to Mexico as planned minus one. They paid me ten dollars a day to water their plants. I never told them that I found the marijuana growing in their backyard.

I unlocked the door, their mail in hand, and inhaled the familiar smell. I dropped the letters on the dining room table and headed to the sunroom with the watering can.

The husband stood there, facing the window away from, hands clasped over his potbelly.

"I'm here to water plants," I told him.

He turned towards me, looking exactly as he had in life, and nodded.

I lifted the watering can above the plant closest to me and farthest from him. Water dripped onto the crumbling soil, turning it mud within the small ceramic pot.

"No, no, no," he cried, rushing to my side. "That's all wrong."

"How can it be wrong?" I said, inching away from him.

"Do it like this," he wrenched the can from my hands to demonstrate.

"Why don't you do it then?" I asked. "If you're so good at it."

He pours water into the pot and it floods but he keeps pouring and the pot is overflowing but he won't stop and it drips onto the floor and I watch it get faster and faster until there is a puddle on the floor.

Slightly Horrible Things

I hope the fly of your pants is always the tiniest bit unzipped but everyone you meet is too polite to say anything and you don't notice until the end of the day.

I hope your shoe comes untied in the middle of crossing a busy intersection and you almost trip but you don't.

I hope your shampoo bottle is always almost but not quite empty so you have to shake it for a minute before anything comes out.

I hope you always have a popcorn kernel stuck in your back molar.

I hope only one of your earbuds works and the other side only works if you sit in an uncomfortable position.

I hope your computer always has network connectivity issues.

I hope you get a small stain on your favorite shirt.

I hope your car always smells like stale French fries.

I hope the Starbucks barista forgets the whipped cream on your drink.

I hope that you run into you of your mom's friends everytime you go to the grocery store and she forces you to talk to her for longer than you'd like.

I hope you always have pit stains.

I hope that you always forget whether or not you turned off the stove before you left the house so you have to remember everything you did before you left until you remember that you did turn it off.

I hope there's always a dead bug on your windshield.

I hope the item you want to buy off of Amazon is always unavailable in the color you want so you have to settle for a slightly uglier color.

I hope you run into your ex when you're wearing sweatpants and haven't showered in three days.

I hope you get an excessive amount of spam email.

I hope your watch is six minutes slow so you're always a little bit late.

I hope that you don't trip

That your shoes are always tied

That your car smells like your cologne

That you're always on time

That you're safe and happy and not full of empty longing like I am.

Osa Svensson

2Floating

135.

i am evaporating,
or trying
(though,
i admit,
unreliably)
my question is
if you have
90 and 30 and 30,
how much
do i gain?

125.

actually,
i am playing small--
doing enlightened shrinking,
testing the length
of the rope hanging
down my throat

120.

to open the chest of our cat cadaver, we had to fracture the ribs
inside-to-outside.

light scoring on the interior side of each rib with scalpel and
crack snap them back,

wrong-sound, juice fly, white see-through splinter, thoracic
cavity gape.

i wonder who will open my chest-gates and peer in to see what i
have lost.

let me make it easier for them-

i have lost everything.

110.

we are meant to make manifest,
call something holy
in an attempt to heal ourselves.
one can't be hurt by things
one does not touch.
there is something cursed
about this cleansing.

100.
this is what makes us
worth something:
the ability to
disappear.
count on your
fingers until
nothing is left
standing.

90.
this is
the sound
of the folds of
my stomach
walls
peeling
off.

80.
ice cream scoop out the things i do not need;
winter coat fat, slumbering muscle, hair forest, nail cliffs.
drift wood arms

70.

i don't like not feeling in control

ice jewels thrust into my back
and numb the muscles under
my skin. i quake when the wind
blows through the stitches and
forces itself into my crevices.
you put your arm around me,
try to thaw the frost pulling my
skin closed. soon my limbs
unlock and i can press closer
to your side and i guess that
invitations come in many different
languages (even ones that aren't
spoken out loud) and i guess i
didn't know what i was saying.
you grab and squeeze and i am
winter again. brittle branches
that forgot how to breathe.
lips frozen shut. i know you
want to evaporate them too. my
lungs are heavy with crystals
and my words are blocked by
the memory of your tongue in
my mouth. i close my eyes.

new day. moon has been whittled
down into a toothpick surrounded
by sleeping stars. i don't look up.
my hands are shaking. the world
is turning fast and the bags split open
without me having to pull out the big
scissors. i grab handful after handful
and swallow whatever power i
thought i had. tomorrow the scale
will break in my bathroom and i
will run for hours. collapse wrong

side up and lay there till i can see
again, till i can sit up again, till my
hands stop shaking for more of
what i have banished. this is the
way of the woman who's been
drowned. i throw up sea salt
bent over, toothbrush in hand.

Zaphra Stupple

breathsick, i leave it anyway

nothing is standing in front of me. its tongue in my mouth.

I am eight, and I am trying to drown in the bathwater. I reach thirty seconds and surface, gasping, disappointed in the air.

nothing and I are kissing and it is easy and quiet and soft. its body an opening.

I am nine, and I last forty seconds this time. in the pool, I feel its arms.

nothing takes me over slow as a waterfall.

I am ten, and it's just a game. a minute. I can't help my pride.

I breathe. nothing's red dress crumples to the floor.

Speak In Tongues

we are grapefruit too sour I tell him.
the last thing and the first thing
I want to do is hurt you.

he builds walls around his ears.
I speak louder.

we are horse hair to the neck.
we bloom thorns.
I hate you like the sky.

he tells me he is not listening.
tells me if he does he will hate me.
will never speak to me again.

please, I beg.
love me like a drought.
eat me neon.
distend my belly with greenfurl wanting.

he places his hand on my head and pushes down,
shrinks me small enough to fit in his pocket.

I scream at him.
we are newborn moondark.
we hate like water.
I want your easy poison.

he cannot hear me.
at most I am chirping.

At 10 pm I meet the illness

she is colorless. come in, I say. sit down. have some coffee. she walks through the door. she has no legs. she doesn't speak. it's raining.

I wrap my arms around her. how are you? I ask. I know the answer. she is a storm without lightning.

I love you, I say. water splashes into the coffee cups. better drink fast. she's not drinking. it's okay, I say. I can drink for both of us. when I empty the cups she refills them.

she holds me. I was wrong. she is made of lightning. her arms singe my hair. I drink more coffee.

am I made of you? I ask. she nods. I want her to swallow me. what are you? I ask. she grows a mouth, smiles. I'm you, she says. her face is tender.

I kneel. please, I beg. consume me. she shakes her head. I don't notice she is gone until she is down my throat.