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Spring 2023

She Who Seeks the Deep

Laci Bowhay

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She Who Seeks the Deep

A poetry chapbook

Laci Bowhay

for my father

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*Sometimes I feel like only a cold still life
That fell down here to lay beside you*

Elliott Smith

Graveyard Gathering

And so we began
the careful working

of the new voice
into the old throat,

caressing all its croaks
into a blooming breath

that wouldn't cease to spill
out of me.

He smiled and asked,
shall we prepare for death

together? offering me the shovel,
smooth where it had splintered

in the hands of many
I'd never known.

Our labor was our loving,
our loving was our sinning.

They sought to save us
from my singing but

we didn't mind dedicating ourselves
to digging our own grave.

Because it was never a grave
we were working.

It was a life.

A Life

Father,

I saw no turtles at the lake today,
nor the heron attacking the eagle.

I saw no mother duck leading her ducklings,
not a fisherman with something to show.

I saw no wind whisper breath to the trees,
nor the sun saunter across the water.

I saw no children swinging or singing,
not a toad in the middle of the road.

And still, in this stillness,
I stopped and I thought

about you and the rock in our garden:
how lovely the silence of growing things.

You were all I saw, and all that I'll see
so, thank you, father.

You have always been
the most beautiful part of me.

The Softest Self

I used to circle the Douglas fir,
furring myself into her fibers,
singing her to the anticipation of autumn,
cradling her release
until there was no pinecone left
unblushed.

We lived in the hush of trust.

No one approved of my caresses,
and fearing corruption,
in disgust, they collapsed her,
hacked her to pieces,
sawed her skeleton
into the frame of a swing set.

A warning
of what they would make of me.

I fled myself like a fugitive,
spent over a decade tracking down
the woman I was supposed to be,
the words they forced down my throat
seething through my teeth
until, one day,
they were all

gone. Sometimes it does work like that.

I return to the swings,
place my palm on the Douglas fir,
and sing as I offer her seeds.

A grave can sprout
the most surprising,
wonderful things.

I have, here in this room, *
watched the moon
watch me
duck behind my plants
out of light, out of sight *
when all I've wanted is to be seen.

There is nothing— *
nothing quite like the attention of the stars.
Yes, I am vain. *
I also am not.
I am everything *
above
below and
within the night sky,
imagining I'm alone. * * *

Surely, the little boys across the street
look at the same sky differently
and do they wish on the first star they see?
do they repeat the words my mother taught me? *

* *starlight, starbright*
first star I see tonight
I wish I may, I wish I might
have the wish I wish tonight

and do they, too, worry about wishing on the right star
and making sure it was actually the first star they'd seen?
do they cover their eyes before they look to the sky so they can trust themselves with certainty?
Certainly, it's not just me.
They must have dreams. *
And they can watch me dream, silhouette s w a y i n g *
at the window. *

I'm just wondering if they're watching through their blinds. *
They could've opened them like mine.
We could've w a v e d *
here and there and we could've s w a y e d—
we've nothing but

* * *
* * *
a whole sky to share.

* * *
* * *

The Maladaptive Self

I wanted butterflies in my hair.
I wanted a field of sunflowers where I could frolic
and fish fireflies from a lavender sky
and bring them to you in a jar
where you slumbered on a yellow blanket
as freckled as the tiger lilies cradling your toes
arm slumped over our picnic basket
overflowing with pickles and herbs and cheese and grapes
and I would wake you by kissing the scars on your face
and we would unscrew the jar together,
your hand over mine, my head on your shoulder
and we would giggle and squeal
as they flew overhead,
the constellations of our sky,
and I would shiver into the heat of your body,
your heartbeat carrying us back and forth,
blurring the places my body meets yours
sinking into the silence of our secret sunset,

slipping

Those Stars I See

The clouds aren't pink,
you say,
and those stars I see,
so far away,
you say,
they aren't there either.
They've long been dead,
and all we see is
time's mysterious elegy
carrying them our way,
although that's also
something I said,
and you laughed
at my mapping of myself
onto the stars,
as if we're not somehow their descendants,
not related at all,
and even if we were,
we're too far removed.
You prove we are.
You scolded me for sleeping
with the blinds up.
You complained when the sun
warmed our faces in the morning.
It could have been beautiful.
It was beautiful.
But you told me to close the blinds
and for some reason,
I did,
and for some reason,
I settled
into your bed.
And for what?

February 14

The beetle I tried to save yesterday
by flipping it to its feet
is back where I left it,
its back on the concrete,
slippery little jewel
now a basin for the rain,
legs tucked in little pools,
dripping, done.

I didn't know insects
also opted for the fetal position
when they're on their last legs,
or rather,
not, I should say.

My body, too, is an offering.
Do with it what you'd like.

I pray all squirrels cross the street safely today.

I know they won't,
and I look away
as I come across another corpse,
another feast for the crows and gulls,
another squirrel so smushed it cannot be distinguished from the pavement anymore.

And the only respect I show is a slight swerve
or a slight pause if there's an oncoming car
before I'm back on my way,
back on my way to doing whatever it is that is more important
than offering a proper burial.

At some point,
the squirrel will be gone from the road,
and I hope someone holds that funeral.
I'd like to attend—

Once I dragged my cats by the scruff
away from the birds, rabbits, and
squirrels
dangling from their mouths,
which were always alive.

I stayed with them.
I sang until they died.
Father and I dug a hole.
I placed a flower on top.
I sang more. And I cried more
until somehow granted permission
to continue, to be still
alive,
but now, I worry.

What part of me has died?

The Hollow Self

Somebody, call my mother.
And please tell her I'm not okay.

In many moments,
all I wanted
was one of her hugs.

It never came.

I couldn't allow myself that intimacy,
not if it could be ripped away,

but I stood watch at the window
when she went on her walks,
went to the store or the gym,

waiting until I could be certain

she was coming back,
and vanishing once she

It is.

It's the itch
of hearing the Other
scratch themselves
in the middle of the night,
and wanting to know
what it'd be like
to relieve oneself.

It's the home-making
in hollow structures
because of the comfort
in collapsing.

It's the every-night-teetering
on the edge of the sinkhole,
not having permission to come closer
because if I even brush her skin,
it will be over.

.Is it.

The Savable Self

I wasn't there, but I remember
when, in the fifth grade,
the blizzard slipped through your fingers.

Your all-day-desire pooling in your shoes,
the squelching and the shame
sprawled out behind you
as you scribbled your way home.

I was there and I do remember
the sharp shiver that overtook you
as you were shoved
into the middle of the circle
of men who mocked you and the tears
you denied. I was startled.
I didn't know you
could cry. And I couldn't
protect you
from the men who laughed.

But I would've scooped the surface layer,
and I would've spoon-fed it to you.
Still pure. Still clean. Still
savable.

Do you still remember?
Or is this another one you erased?

Two years ago,

my father climbed 20 feet up a tree
to retrieve my brother's frisbee
and yesterday,
when I went home,
he asked me to get the mail.

It was 53 steps from the door to the mailbox and back to the porch.
Yes, I counted.

I wanted to know how many feet were too many.
I wanted to know what happened to the man in that tree.

He never came back to me.

One day,
he'll really never come back.

The only question I have is—
how many times will I lose you before you go?

How lovely the silence of the night.

How lovely the silence of growing things.

I know you don't hear it anymore.

You don't meet my eyes when I whisper your name.

The forests of your eyes tumbled to marble.

I dust your lips with kisses every day.

Please.

Lay your chin on my hand.

Settle your claws.

In my skin.

There's someone for you at the door.

But.

If I don't get up,

will you not let them in?

Self-Cento

I prayed
it was a life,
Father.

All I've wanted is to be seen.
I wanted to know how
to be still, to be alive.

Am I vanishing,
Father?
You, at the edges.

Come closer
before you go.
Come closer.

Let go. Let them in.

Welcome In

The Mythic Self

I was choking on stars,
clutching my seatbelt,
and breathing on the window
to remind myself I was alive.

At some point during the drive,
I began to leak
a steaming,
golden trickle.

Fear has a funny smell,
one mother couldn't wash out.

That night, I feasted
on my baby teeth,
captured the dark of the sky
in the dawn of my bowl,

stirred with my finger and
forced them down my throat.
It wasn't enough.
I submerged my face,

bathing in my blood,
bellowing in bubbles,
until my howl was one
with the hum of the earth.

I've been quiet ever since.
Lurking the surface.

The Sacrificial Self

I keep swallowing
to see if it hurts
and it does,
so I do it again.

Wallowing,
I've heard it called,
in each pin prick
and pushing deeper.

I am a poet.
This is what poets do.
I slice pieces from myself
to stitch pretty words together
for you.

Fill your sails elsewhere

Can't stand the storm, / can you? / Didn't see it at first, / did you? / Calm. / Chill. / Sweet. / Kind. / Sure, / if you'd rather not know her, / that's fine. / Everyone ends up saying / she's not what they expected. / It's / great at first / and gets worse. / Progressive, / like some disease, / she's possessive, / aggressive, / and defensive, / too much, / too intense, and / too pensive, / too self-involved, / and self-centered, / too obsessive. / She's excessive. / Keep her at bay. / Keep a safe distance, / and she'll be kind, / and you'll be fine. / Only one need weather the storm. / And honestly, / that's fine. /

Toddlers want things that are bad for them

and later, realizing reality was a construct,
recognizing the inherent instability,
father tried to convince me the world wasn't going to crumble,
the bombs wouldn't be dropped on my bed,
as he opted to persuade me with some patriotic rhetoric,
some *this is how it's always been,*
we're the greatest there'll ever be,
then left me
feeling worse.

I still check the closet.
I still lay awake waiting for shadows to twitch beyond the door.
I still look under my bed to make sure there's no one waiting with a sword,
seeking to stab me once I've finally settled in.
But that's not entirely true either.

If I die,
then I'll be dead, and
I'll worry about it then,
meaning:
I'll never worry again.
That's what mother said.

It must also be a lie
because I still cry every time
I feel what it is to die.
I feel the void growing
every time I ponder suicide.
One last act of agency.
At least I'd decide.

I used to tell myself,
If you do it now and find out,
you won't have to be afraid
ever again.
It's tempting enough.

I'm sorry.
I've said too much.
I should've listened when she said,
Lace,
you don't need to confess every thought you've ever had.
It's okay to keep some things to yourself.

But the spirit of another inhabits my eyes.
I'm afraid to look at her.
I worry one day she'll ask,
Why didn't you do it sooner?

How I disrespect some dead

Children will remember the dust
gliding golden through the garage
and sprinting up the staircase
to safety
to you

Children will remember you at the edges
the static fraying their painting
of the forest and the lake
that cracked off the canvas

Children will remember something about a bowl of soup,
something about watching you eat
for the first time, altered
something about you struggling to hold a spoon
something about becoming ill and leaving
something about feeling guilty about you seeing them upset
something about feeling
everything

Children will walk around the house
where one final wheeze wrecked the world

Children will walk through the garden
where they'll steal your favorite stone

Children will walk to the basketball court
where the water fountain doesn't work

Children will walk around the pond
awaiting your reflection over their shoulder

Children will speak with the sky
like they did the night they hid
from the ambulance's lights
in the backyard bushes
ears plugged, whispering,
this isn't real, this isn't real

Children will find that they're no longer children

Children will give up on omens and seek refuge
in poems
slicing themselves open
with words you won't heed
come closer
they're begging
come closer

The Eviscerated Self

She thinks she is art. Her fluid voice seeping through the cracks of the door while speaking to her family. As long as they don't see her eyes, they'll think she is fine. She takes pride in the hiding. Or how she can open up and tuck away every memory in a secret place so no one can ever know where she is or where she's been. So neat, so categorized, she patrols the library of her mind as if it were a prison. Her prison. Keeping everyone out. Reining herself in. Where beyond the bars are mirrors. And she applauds herself as she practices disassociating, the successful switch from sobbing to straight-faced, and back to sobbing. One second. Not even. One snap marks the transition. And she practices her faces. She practices her fidgets, her sidelong glances, her pauses, her stumbles, her hair tucks, her lip bites. She thinks she is art. So perfectly poised. So composed.

She is good, so good.
That's what they always tell her:
You're being so good.

Maci

And I'd always wished I were born
in the season of life
not the season of death

but I know dying
to give way to life
seems to suit me best.

But not you.
Not the way your name sprang
bleeding hearts from winter's grave

for all to see and your voice
propelled petals across the sea
and we never knew

how old you were
nor what month you were born
but I know it was May.

So it seems wrong
I didn't die
before you

or, at least,
with you.
Something did.

You wouldn't remember
unless you somehow still do,
that mother was afraid you'd live

to twenty-eight.
And even when you got sick,
even when the doctor accidentally exclaimed,

“Oh goodness, she's still alive?!”
and I was startled by her surprise
and annoyed she'd underestimated your might,

I had faith in twenty-eight—
I still do
because most of the time

I forget you're not actually
alive but today I finally caught myself
before asking father,

“Where's *Maci*?”

because it does no good
to share you.

It was always just us
two.

And I thought they'd comfort me,
and, indeed, they tried,
and I thought I'd find myself living in someone else's arms

but the second you were gone
they wiped their hands clean.
Done.

Gone.

No more thoughts.
No responsibilities.
What a blessing was your leaving.

And they'll humor me
with an almost sad smile but
May,

there's no one here willing to hold my hand.
There's no one here even willing to touch me.
But I can still feel

you
settling and sleeping in my lap.
Not everyone believes

in ghosts.
Not everyone is afraid
of what they cannot see

but I have a sense that they should be
because you knew this
and you shared it with me

and *May,*
what do I do with all the things you gave me?
who can I give this to?

How to pretend you're okay:

You won't really move on,
you'll just stop crying every day.

When she pops into your mind,
smile fondly, and stomp the memory

into the muck.

Walk away.

Be merciful.

For now. You can go

back. Maybe later.

Just not today.

And that's how you'll keep moving.

That's how you'll survive every day.

**When my father is feeling old,
he recalls our neighbor, Mary.**

A Golden Shovel

My youth unraveled in her front yard, hunting the
last ladybug from the blue silk gentian, stuffing it in
defense. A closure could be a home.

Is it wrong to protect the things you love?
The netting ached, but I could be
present, vigilant, at a cage. The door was
tense when I opened it. Three had died. I had to let them go.

It was never easy being
little. And every day, father
hurts, being the boy forced to butcher the bunny, being the man who forced
me to grate my teeth against the flesh on the plate.
Now he apologizes to me when he happens to look,
to know the worst parts of me belong to him. To
know nothing at all.

I have always been my father's son, and he
shall always be the most beautiful part of me.
Not here though, perhaps. Not anymore. He needs me to
go. He imagines me

cathedral-hunting overseas
in places he will never see. He needs me in
Spain, needs me to succeed. Neither a failure
nor a triumph, but a man. He does what men do, and there will be no
cherrying before he is tucked away
in some nursing home, like Mary, somewhere in
Michigan or some other state I can't locate.
Or maybe we could just be. Here. In my mind, we are in
Maine, where we were beautiful, once, and together.

The truth:

There is no consolation.

I will write the words I want to hear
but what he said was,

I can't tell you how many hours long a day is. How long a night is.

And every day he seemed to worsen.
More frantic. More afraid.
More alone and lying on the bed most all the day—
it's like we go from one crisis to the next
—and debating going to the emergency room.

*I'm not really that bad,
I'm just that frustrated.*

Which is only half true.
It is bad. Sometimes it is only bad.
And all we can do is watch someone we love
fade and fade away.

I offer a warning:
every resolution is another wound.
There is only so much my words can do.

I don't know what to do.

Self-Cento

we itch
we pray
we wake
we look away

we

the ghosts, the ash
the beetle, the ants
the gulls, the squirrel
the last ladybug, the little worm

unfurled

you're afraid

I'm afraid

we stay

If we slip on the ice, they will say it was our fault for being here

We laughed, yes,
at the idiocy
of the man on the screen,
cackled under the crackling itch of his face
as we smacked him with our shoes,
socks, shirts, shorts,
and every other burden
we'd been bearing.

We laughed, yes,
at the ripping off,
at the clean coming,
at the rasping thirst
aching out our mouths.

We laughed, yes,
at the people
passing by our window,
worshiping their meatsuits.

And we laughed
our way to clenched thighs,
burgeoning bile,
and the cracking whites of our eyes,
and when it was no longer funny,
because it never was,
we cried ourselves to sleep.

We wandered forever
wondering,
Who would I show it to

we have always been ready

i am begging the surface
tension to not break
not now
not all over
me
not now
not as i've been teeter
ing around the tempest
but they are too
and they are
begging me budging me burgeoning me
throwing
pebbles
in my
basin
this sacred home
and it is too heavy
for me to hold
alone
and with these new hands
cupping mine
the stones settle in place
and there's only one way the water can flow
and i've heard of this before —
it is over
pour

Basking in the sunlight, strawberries dipped in sour cream & rolled in brown sugar

That's how it should be.
Could be.
Beneath the sun too long,
berries begin to melt
& I'm tired of being

sticky.

If I could claw off every layer of skin, I would.
But what would it reveal?
No one likes the core.
It has no flavor.
No one savors the wet crunch.

We just never should have been here,
you know?
There's sand in my ass
& grains in my teeth
that I'll never get out.

If I walked into the sea,
would anyone bother to follow?
Your stale perfume
staining the spring air
suggests an answer,
but I still want to ask.

Humans only want warmth.
I only wanted your body to protect mine.
I didn't think that was too much to ask.
But I guess it's good you're gone.
I've always been fond of melancholy.

I'm going back home.
Sinking in murky depths,
I beg for mercy.
I am okay with this—
six feet never felt deep enough.

You can find me anywhere—
I left you relics of myself
everywhere we'd go.

Where We Go

the washing...

we sage the shower and we
frisk away the parts
of ourselves we
no longer
desire and the drain,
with its gaping grimace,
gurgles, giddy, and

we should have drowned
in our rot
but it becomes the thing
we want, we crave,
we make ourselves
real by loving
things we should hate

...loving things we should hate

but what if
sand castles never washed away?
and what if
what we were building
was neither sand
nor a castle,
and in its construction,

we were made
real?

The (Un)Removable Self

What I envisioned was straightforward,
linear:

Dressing my dolls,
their falling in love,
a meticulous ceremony.

Then, dressing myself
for the boys at school
in a red t-shirt (I didn't have)
to show off the large breasts (I don't have).

Everything had been modeled.
I practiced.
I ran my fingers over the curves of my barbies,
memorized their perfect bodies,
placed my fingers on myself,
and clutched the parts that could be
better.

I molded myself.
As I scolded myself.
The daily and nightly preoccupation with my
two rolls of fat and lack
of femininity,
at least, the kind they searched for in me.

I didn't want to be pretty.
I didn't want to be girly.
I didn't want to be scared to speak.
I didn't want to be subservient.
It was the course.
It was the only way.
It was the natural progression of girl
to woman.

And why:
I did it all
so I'd have an answer
when I'm asked who I am.

The (real) truth:
I don't know.
I'm still unfolding.
I'm still remembering who I am.

Watching My Father Watch My Mother

After Lorna Crozier

No one taught us
how to do this,
what to say,

so I will ask
how you are
and you might reply,

*better
than yesterday,*

dull twinkle in your eye
and the soft smile
you compose just for me.

I will nod
as if I understand
the things you are going through,
the things your body is doing to you,
the things you are doing to yourself.

There are many things you will never know,
father.
So many things I have never said.
So many things we will never say.

Instead,
we will converse about the weather
or how many loads of laundry you've done.
Sometimes,
about the pains in your body
or the fog in your head.
And I won't be able help
it, father,
I will write what you will say.

In December—
*I don't feel good,
and I don't know how to change that.
I guess I can't change.*

In February—
*I feel like I've only been half
here
ever since I got back from the lake.*

In June—
Just live each day

*and hope for the best,
I guess.*

*In July—
I've got a hitch in my giddy up.*

*In August—
I love ruts,
I crawl in them all the time
and
Your mom deserves more
than me,
but she's just kind of stuck
with me
and
I may never play mini golf again.*

*As we walk
through the forest,
you behind her,
I behind you,
landing my footsteps
to smooth yours
into serpentine streaks
sealed on the earth's floor,
you will also say,
to mother—*

*If in life,
you go your pace
and I go mine,
we'll meet somewhere past the end*

*and I knew you
then.*

*The whole world swooned,
the leaves cooed,
the frogs flew overhead,
the trees grew toward you,
the tears blew from my cheeks
pursuing the sun,
rejoicing,
rejoicing!
you remembered your voice and
I knew—*

I will never witness a love like that again.

*Until the end,
father,*

I'll see you then—

Someday I'll Love this Existential Dread

After Ocean Vuong

Laci, it is okay to be afraid.
The reflection on the water isn't any less real
than the sky above. It's just carried differently.
It's okay to be mistaken.
In his mind he's made a shape
that's tethered to your name,
and you may clutch her chains,
but she is his—his love and pain. It's okay
to let go. When the rain comes,
no one will know your name.
Like the ink on your page—Laci,
it's okay to fade. Let each tear tear you
and carry you further away. You are a ripple
traversing the lake,
following and followed by infinite waves
and in the wake, you will awake.
So it is okay to live twisted, but remember—
the body is not a cage.
Crumple. Cocoon. And create
a cotton cradle to crease into yourself
over and over again. Ease into yourself.
And when the world reappears in the softest green hues,
it will be time. The trees will show you
what it means to be alive. Laci,
do you see them breathe?
See the spirit shake their leaves?
Laci, do you see?
It is okay to be afraid.
In the unknown, all is known,
and there you are.
You are not alone.

Reasons to Not:

Because the sign said birch street and I read it as bitch street, and it made me laugh.

Because I tried to type thankfully and it autocorrected to “that idiot,” which he was, which he is.

Because a cat rested his head on my lap and fell asleep with my touch.

Because the spider on the ceiling decided to stay there through the night.

Because she likes hot cars and because she rode in mine and because I know I’ll be seeing her there soon again.

Because six people complimented my dress today.

Because I smiled at every woman I passed, and they all smiled back.

Because in the sunbeam, I kicked up dust and watched it dance.

Because on the mountain they built a grave where he hunted for fifty years, and I witnessed the pinwheel forever moving with the breeze.

Because mother saw me, and her tears warmed my shoulder.

Because I’m going to Spain and father is proud.

Because my brother quipped that he can’t wait to not see me for a year.

Because a bee was coiled in my curls, and it didn’t sting when I set it free.

Because yesterday, I swear, she was about to kiss me.

Because the callouses on my feet are yellow and strong.

Because father made it to age seventy.

Because now I recognize wild onion flowers everywhere I go.

Because that child gave me a hug and said that she loves me.

Because mother bandaged my blisters softer than I knew she could.

Because the man who I thought I would never touch pulled me in for a hug.

Because I overwatered the plants and they still knew to blossom.

Because now there are 42 poems in this collection.

The Chaos Self

I want to be a bar bender,
sharpen my teeth against them,
and bite harder.

I'll gnaw them to nubs
till I'm numb,
til they're gone.
But no one
will have my tongue.

Come kiss my toothless grin.

The Chaos Self

I want to be a
bar bender,
sharpen my teeth against them,
and bite harder.

I'll gnaw them to nubs
til I'm numb,
til they're gone.
one.
But no one
will have my tongue.

Come kiss
my toothless grin.

Kiss Me Numb

Come
bar bender
gnaw my tongue
sharpen my teeth
bite my nubs
bite harder
bite

Chaos Numb

Bender teeth.
Harder Kiss.
No one gone.
My will.
Have my tongue.

Fragmented

There was never a moment
we could stop
running to the edges,
hoping a glitch would
flip us to the realm
where we could really love
one another
the way one needs another,
needs another to envelop one's fist
with kisses blown to open
the palm to the wind.

And on our way
to the place we couldn't go,
tumbling in the tempest,
he fell.
We stopped.
I imagined taking off,
firmly fleeing my delusion
of needing to be known
because we needed no definitions,
we needed no permissions,
we were an open-ended beginning.

When I offered him my hand,
he never let me go.
I needed no apology.

He is the only love I have.
The only love I'll never know.

It was nice to know you

no, I
suppose I
never did
never held you
never smoothed down your eyebrows
never tucked in the tag of your shirt
never adjusted the clasp of your chain to be centered on your neck
never got to ruffle your hair, especially that one piece that's always falling to the middle of your forehead,
which you can't see, and which I often wonder if you can feel, but even if I were allowed to touch you, I
can't say I'd move that stray piece,
I say,
let things fall where they may and
in May
we wrote, we met,
I gifted you words and you said they meant so much,
but again no
touch,
again no
all I want to know is you,
just my grief over the death of something that never got to be,
that could be and should be, so
you said *you don't need to mourn this*
and all I felt was the release of breath with the word *yet*
just one little word, one tiny word
that reminded me
we are all going to die,
but we're not dead yet, and if we are not dead yet,
why aren't you pushing my curls behind my ears and kissing my neck
when I repeat back to you *yet*
yet your eyes tell me everything,
your eyes have always been kind and met mine,
even when you're afraid of how I know you must surely feel and
even when I'm afraid because you refuse to look away,
but I don't mind,
I will squirm happily like the little worm I am just to be under your gaze,
just to be anything,
anything by you, or for you, and with you—
I just want to know you
I only want to know you
and I swear that I do
as you string together every possible combination of words synonymous with that phrase
I love you,
and have you ever thought about how silly the value is of that one silly phrase because you have shown
me time and again that it is true
so don't say it's not allowed because I know you already do
and I have written this before,
let me love you, too
I just want to know you
I only want to know you

and I swear that I do
no
I suppose I never did
and
I suppose I never will
but I love you
I
love
you

Planning a Funeral

We are the ants,
marching
 one by one
 from the earth
up whatever hill we deem fit,
staking a claim
 as we tread the path
 someone else made,
 and awaking in the rain
 the same something,
and easing into our crumpling,
 returned to the soil,
 part of the cyclical stirring,
 until it all stops someday.

Or maybe it never will.

I profess to know nothing.
Nothing really makes sense and
this is why we write poems
we're frightened and facing a lot of unknowns
but what I do know is that
 we carry our dead
 in the burial mounds
 bulging along our backs
because it is worth the risk of dying
to bring them back home.

The garden was difficult to maintain

Pungent onlookers popped knuckles,
punched up their sleeves,
and plucked our petals.

We sucked up another punishing breath.

Yet the aching alliums
and the moaning roses
only made our efforts more
beautiful. And the ghosts.
They howled in such peculiar places.
We had to prepare.

In the morning,
we unfurled from one another.
Our desire to be felt, to be
alive, so thick
as it dripped into the soil.

They set our fields ablaze.

And in the mourning,
we shared
the solemn smile.
Again.

Where the dust dozed on the window,
you pressed your palm
and then placed it in mine.
What between us could we cherish
more than ash?

Grief grew the garden
again and again.

Free time

I wish I could
free time,
pry it from my fingertips,
stripped and
let it go. No,
I know I
never had control
but I had fear
and I had hope
and I didn't just
cope.
I think I
even smiled once
in a while,
flashed my unflossed yellow teeth and
some were disturbed,
others unperturbed,
and we drank coffee
and wine
and denied dentistry because
if our jaws rot and fall off —
well, that's the point:
our.

Odd, letting go.
Let me kiss your crooked teeth, and I'll be on my way.

Thomas Wayne

A velvet-voiced man.
An arrogantly humble sort of fellow.
A rich republican
who spoiled me
with so many wonderful things
I held,
hugged,
kissed.

Who frequented the mini fridge
for some sort of beverage.
We passed each other there. Once.
I remember.

Who was someone's father,
but mainly mine.

Who kept nuts on the coffee table
with various nut crackers.
Who spoke while he chewed.
Whose tongue skated his teeth
to collect the residue.

Who went antiquing
and crystal hunting.
Who had a basement of treasures.
Who hid nothing.

Who went on walks with me to the pond.
Who drank from the water fountain
while I watched from the court.
Come closer, I think I thought.
Come closer.

Who had a painting of the forest and the fog
so ominous that I knew it was an omen.
Something was screaming through the silence.
Something was reaching to rip us open.

Whom I think about every night
and search for in the stars
as I ache to hold their light.
Whose stone I will visit
once again.
Whom I will offer
a beverage,
some nuts,
a poem.

Thomas Wayne,
promise me someday
you'll blossom
through all the voids
I've grown.

Self-Cento

A grave can sprout
 a blooming breath.
The hush of trust.
 The lovely silence of growing things.

Grief grew our garden
 beneath the constellation of fireflies
and the whole sky we share.

The Wreckage

I planned to set sail to someday
shaking off excuses
tomorrow when
out of the blue

today

someday
I'd rid myself of
she came
and said *no*,

so forcefully
all my life

a line

she burst the boat I'd been building
and she didn't throw me

she offered her hands
she tucked my curls behind my ears

she took me in her arms
she gifted me breath

as the storm sank behind us
and to think
that's where I stood
to think
someone saved me
to think

she

saw
me

she

sees
me

just one day together
where have you been all my life?
her freckles are the constellations
that I'll bathe in tonight
unravel me
she weaves us together

to think

and I've already asked
how already
that guide my life
how her sweet and her tender
and she weaves me in her arms
and

it all was leading me to her
it was all so I could come
home

There was a new star in the sky tonight.

I knew it at once, yes—
 I knew at first sight
for never had there been a star quite so bright
it could only be you, yes—
 it was your light
soothing our fears, bringing us peace
and at last, yes—

tonight, we will sleep.