The 22nd Annual Masquerade

Isabella Royster

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The 22nd Annual Masquerade

Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of a sculpted metal mask, with abstract swirling designs, corroded light green in color.
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For Faith,
my long suffering beta reader.
Originality

Originality is dead
Oh, I can feel the tension from here
You disagree?
Only because you’re terrified
That if what I say is true
Then what’s the point?
What’s the purpose of creating
If creating’s just restating
The same old thing?
But it’s not that simple
Cause, you see, originality’s been dead for centuries
The greatest of poets plagiarized
While storytellers stole
The best bits of legends
And made them their own
We are a culture of remixes
revamping and reworking what we know
into something we don’t
So yeah, I’m a walking, talking reference to someone, something in the past tense
Already been said, already been done,
But it’s in me here to find those words, long worshiped and forgotten, and to scream them from the rooftops and make them mine
Originality is dead
That doesn’t mean I have to be
I was born
Right before winter
Hungry for words
I couldn't read
Every waking second
Begging for more
To be poured
Into my ears
Until I could pour them
Directly into my eyes
Every day since
I've sought more
Insatiable
Consuming so many
They've started to consume me
Overflowing from my pores
I find them under my nails,
Tangled in my hair
Between my toes
I rub them from sleepy eyes
Staying up far too late
And wondering
In the moments
Between asleep
And alive
If one day
I'll take all those
Billions of words
I've collected
And rearrange them
Into something new
Something interesting
Something mine.
Medieval

Six year old me wanted
To save the world
I wanted to swing my sword
And send my armies to battle
To fight the good fight and win
Because the good guys always win
I wanted shining armor
And a well stocked armory
I dreamed of running in
With no backup and a crackpot plan
And returning victorious
I wanted to be the hero
But I also stayed up late praying for scales
Instead of skin
And of fiery breath to burn the world
Down to nothing
For wings to fly above the atmosphere
So high the ground melds into colors and the sun
Is so close it's blinding
I wanted a hoard of treasure to protect
A thousand years of legends
At my grasp
I wanted to rule
You could say I was indecisive
I guess I still am
I never could decide if I wanted to kill a dragon
Or be one
Alt Text: A vintage, wall mounted metal lamp with six sides and artful detailing.
Icarus

We mock Icarus
For his foolishness
And folly
Arrogantly thinking
He could fly so close to the sun
And not be burned
For it.
But tell me
Honestly
That if you were
Trapped in the dark
For decades
And were one day given
Freedom and wings
You wouldn't try
To touch
The skies above
Drunk on fresh air
And sunbeams
Lost in newly
Fulfilled daydreams
Tell me you wouldn't
Be alright dying
in a literal blaze of glory
With all your hopes finally
Turned to reality
Over going out quietly

Alt Text: Edens on the WWU campus, shot from below. It has four columns and is golden in color in this photograph, with a clear sky behind it.
In the cold cage
Of your old destiny
Crowned

Stuck in one spot in space
Thoughts churning, mind wild, all revved up and ready
But there's nowhere to go
Everything's closed except home
The news brings more word, each day, saying that
the walls we've built for warmth should keep
closing around us, tighter and tighter till we break
and go insane
So I wait and wait, breathing stale air because the
air outside may carry a cough and a gasp and a
choke that ends in silence
No one knows how this ends
We barely know how it began
But it's here, and we're stuck in the middle of a
maybe crisis
Pandemic plaguing the world at large in a
thousand little ways
The store was out of everything today
All I can do is sit in my lonely tower
Write the words that can't leave my cage
And settle in for the long haul
Because the world outside
Is crowned
In silence
Absolutes

When I was ten
I told you I wanted
Hair so long it rivaled Rapunzel's
You laughed and told me it'd be wonderful to see
But now that I have it cropped short
Buzzed close to my scalp
Swearing to keep it this way till the end
You're laughter turns strained
Warning me it might be a phase
You were so fine with me dealing in absolutes
When those absolutes fit within your frame of view
And here I sit at a crossroads between young and old, between genders of all shapes and sizes
Looking to find myself in this mess we call a world
And you watch with bated breath, staying supportive aloud but whispering behind my back all the while
Begging the God I used to share with you to change my mind
But isn't he supposed to love me regardless?
HimHerThem

There's hair in his eyes
And a smile on his lips
And the world on his mind
While my head leans
On shoulders
Just a bit broader than mine
And I think
"I could get used to this"
But then she walks by
With long fingers
She uses to tuck back
Longer hair
Behind her ear
With a wide grin
And stars glittering
In her pupils
And I'm not so sure anymore
When they turn to me
I'm even more confused
Cause their bruised knees
Colored cheeks
And laughing red mouth
Paired with the way
They live for themself
Is bound to drive me insane
Maybe I was wrong
But maybe I was right
But which is which
And who is the one
I wish was mine
And how do I know
For sure?
Maybe it's because
For me
People
Are far too pretty
And passionate
And full of potential
For me to have
A preference
Of pronouns
So as long as you see, hear, and like me
And I see, hear, and like you too
Than you're good for me
As long as you're sure
That I can be good
For you.


**Touch Starved**

I want to be loved  
The way I love other people  
Far too easily falling  
Into the depths of someone else  
And, god, it's happened enough times  
That I'm starting to think  
I'm desperate for someone's touch  
As much as their heart  
Laying awake at night  
Palms sliding over skin  
Wishing the fingers between my thighs belonged  
to someone else  
Or maybe weren't fingers at all  
Slipping into half stupors  
Not lost enough  
Cause you can only bring yourself so far over the  
edge on your own  
Sweat settling on my skin  
Far too sticky  
Afterglows aren't nearly as beautiful when you're  
alone  
So come here and dive in  
And take anything and everything you want from  
me  
As long as you swear to me  
You'll keep me too  
Because I want a body in my bed
But not more than I want a beating heart
To hold me close and bask in the idea of us
Finally together
In the way I wish we were
Just give into it, baby
And maybe
I'll feel like someone really loves me back
In full
Riptide

The ocean runs through my veins
And the veins of my family before me
They introduced us when
I’d barely left the waters of my birth
It was my first friend
I played in the Pacific and studied its creatures
And it indulged my desperate curiosity
When I scraped my toddler knees
On rough sand and stone
It cleaned my wounds
Nowadays the waters whisper
Sweet nothings in my ear
Dragging me into daydreams
Across the horizon
In many ways
It’s more than provided
But in certain others
It has cursed us too
My grandmother needs to hear it
Her cassette tapes
Of crashing waves
Are the only things that let her sleep at night
My mother needs to see it
She stands pacing
Restless if she hasn’t
Trekked over
Or very near
The water in days
I need to feel it
Fairly often
Rocking me to sleep or sedation
Running under my fingertips
Or enveloping me completely
As I give my autonomy over
To the riptide
The ocean runs through my veins
Some of my blood runs through it too
And sometimes I wonder
What that inky darkness
Has done with my gory devotion

Alt Text: A waterfall caught from the side, overflowing and frothing around the rocks.
HimHerThem Pt 2

We didn't think it would happen again
But here we are
Pondering our place in the universe
But instead of panicking about who I could love
I've been panicking about who I am
Here I am
Stuck in a female body in a female space
With a female name
And sometimes that's okay
But I'm realizing now that sometimes
It's not
Sometimes I look down
Hear my name
And get called a certain way
And all I can think is
Wrong
Cause I have girl days
And guy days
And days where I'd rather be
A void than a person
The craziest days are when I'm some
Unexpected combo
Of two
Or all three
So I've come to the conclusion
Three years late
That I love HimHerThem
And HimHerThem is me
Alt Text: Two near identical brick walls pressed up against each other; the right one an orange brown, the left one silvery.
We Went Out Walking

We went out walking
In chilly twilight air
Me with my new camera
You indulging my childish glee
As we run between trees
Looking for ghosts
And faery lights
In ordinary lines
We still go out
Once in a while
Me without my camera
You waiting patiently for me
As we look up
Through branches
Breathing in moonbeams
And spilling out mythology
Night moments with you
When we wander into the woods
Still too awake to sleep
We weave divine and eldritch glory
Waxing poetic about
A quiet sort
Of eternity
Alt Text: A globe streetlamp at dusk surrounded by cherry blossoms.
Soft

I sit across the couch
From you
Just watching
Your soft banter
And softer hands
And soft strumming
Of our favorite songs
As we put off all the things
We told ourselves we'd do
Just a moment longer
Dim Christmas lights cascade
Across your faces
And I write this in the corner
Content with my space
In the sort of symphony
We've formed
To fill our unspoken
But well known need
For contact
And I'm struck
With how badly
I've grown to need you
Like I've only needed air before
And how can I possibly
Live without
These moments that I
Don't even need
To romanticize
Because loving you
Already feels like some kind
Of perfect storyline

Alt Text: White, flowering branches stretched over bricks in the background.
One pair of hands stroke my hair
As another pair of legs
Tangle with mine
I can hear murmuring
From across the room
As our breaths mingle in twilight
The movie ended
Hours ago
And yet we linger
One of you in pajamas
My nice shirt buttons undone
But it hardly matters
The couch is rough
So's the ground
But under our blankets
And layered bodies
We are blurred together
Until the disappearing time
Belongs to an us
That won't exist again
Til morning
Avant Garde

I miss the days
When my trauma and pain
Was avant garde
I could weave my reckoning
Into storytelling
And pretend the hole in my chest
Was something pretty words could fill
But now that I'm standing at its edge
Having thrown everything I am
Into the pit
All I'm left with is my alright taste in music
And the sour taste in my mouth
Wondering where that multicolored smoke
I manufactured went
Now it's all mirrors
Reflecting the burnt out fantasies
Of an artist in progress
Easier to Drown

Don't hold your breath
Just hold onto it
You tell yourself
But your nerves are already stinging
In jellyfish pinpricks
Of warning
There is no water in your throat
You know this well
But you are still gasping for air
That isn't entering shell shocked lungs
Paralyzed like your numbing face and fingers
As your subconscious slowly but surely
Pulls you under
Your heart pounds louder an uneven rhythm
To match the chaotic staccato of the thoughts
Seeping into your veins
And you regret
Ever having
A body
As your wandering mind
Tricks it into thinking its dying
You wish you were dying
Dying would have a point
Unlike the electricity that runs unceasingly
Through you
Making your organs curl in on themselves
In fear of what it'll do next
What you'll do next
You are both shark and blood
Predator and prey
Cursing with the low oxygen allowed
All the ways you've allowed yourself
To be

Alt Text: Continued from last page.
Addict

I’ve never had laughter
Burn my throat like this
Like a downed shot
Scorching under my skin
I’ve never felt this tipsy
On an experience
As words dance and clash
In vibrant air
Every sideways glance
Every curse lined with chuckles
We can’t help
Is a hit of the one drug
I can’t resist
My family
And old friends
Had their vices
I thought I knew the signs
And how to circumnavigate them
But I’ve spent so long
Avoiding the obvious options
That I’m suddenly neck deep
In your unexpected
Hallucinatory haze
And I don’t know
If the goal is even to escape
Now that I’ve finally
Found my one perfect
Ode to my Creative Writing Class

To giggled reactions in crowded corners
To compliments blooming from ecstatic tongues
To ideas brimming in half asleep heads
To cloth covered grins that shine in twenty some pairs of eyes
To show-and-tells of strange artifacts that are covered in bits of our souls
To the scratch of pencils and the clicks of keys
To someone else’s words opening imaginative doors
To our deepest desires finally breathing fresh air
To the rough multicolored carpet under my ink stained fingertips
To bittersweet goodbyes and well wishes
To desperate prayers of matched up schedules next quarter
To memories we’re lucky enough to have forever written down
Alt Text: A daffodil, facing head on.
Decay

I've spent years
Cursing and obsessing
Over the cracks
In the pavement
That cover my route home
My city is evolving
By decaying
As the overgrowth
Overtakes
The empty spaces
I once knew
One day
Whatever spirit I have
Will likely leave this form
And with luck
I'll make good fuel
For flowers
Growing from the empty spaces
You once knew
And when my bones
Are washed ashore
Or found in caverns
Of old
Long after my city is gone
I wonder
If the people that find me
If they find me at all
Will use them better
Then I ever could

Alt Text: A near barren branch with only a few leaves, reaching upwards towards a gray sky.
Kneel Like I Used To For You

I've heard a lot of kids
Who grew up like me
Between cathedrals
Under crosses carrying the world
We wished loved us
Say they wished more than anything
That they could just fight god
And win
I suppose I get the appeal
Of my bloody knuckles mixed
With ichor from omnipotent veins
But in the years since
I've left those halls and corridors
Filled with eyes
And false understanding behind
I think the only thing
That could heal me of his healing
Is to fuck him instead
The idea of him begging
Laid out underneath me
Striped bare and oh so desperate
For my heavenly fire touch
Willing to take
Whatever punishment or praise
Sin or sainthood
That I'm willing to give
Is more of a religious experience

Alt Text: A large building with a large, pointed turret.
Than religion ever was
Because the god I grew up under
Needing me just as badly
As I was taught to need him
Finally admitting
That we were always equals
Is when I'll finally
Be free

Alt Text: Continued from last page.
**EXCHANGE**

The cult called church  
Chants in my aching ears  
But I will not listen  
The sharp angles of their words  
Rhythmic rhyming  
Of the way they think  
The world should be  
 Doesn’t have to be  
Our destiny  
They want us to  
Give and give and give  
Or do nothing but take  
But our love is an exchange  
Where even if we fight  
I’m still the one cleaning blood  
Out of your worn blue jeans  
Neither of us is a deity or patron  
Setting expectations on  
The others shaking shoulders  
Like lone Atlas stuck holding  
The impossible sky  
We are not unshakable ideas  
That last centuries  
Like hymns  
Lined with expectation  
We are two strange creatures settling  
In the aftermath of colliding
Finding ourselves and each other
In the wolf wildness of your scars
And the oak tree rings of my eyes
THYME

Time is a trail
Of dark green vines
Wrapping longer and tighter
Around the chain link fence
In my mother's backyard
She thinks it's a weed
Constantly uprooting them
To save her carefully cultivated garden
But no matter what she did
The stubborn strands
Regrew as soon
As she replaced them
But reshaped to her decisions
And demands
Wrapping around wood posts
And newly planted pear trees
In a different swirl every time
I always secretly
Loved their flowers
Sprouting from tightly coiled leaves
In bursts of snow that I rarely got to see
And felt no need
To alter the course they were on
Maybe our future is shaped
By what foundation we give
The things we cannot change
My mother plants time
In neat little rows
While I let life grow wild
Ahead of me

Alt Text: A small plant with thick green leaves, rising from the dirt.
Rings

Precious earthen ores
Set aflame on dancing digits
As I talk with my hands
Some ancient as my family line
Others cheaply made
But with catching design
They chitter and laugh
In their own clockwork language
As the harmony to my clumsy human tongue
Hiding my discoordination under draconian grace
They clothe my skin like scales
My armored assembly adding draconian strength
To my soft underbelly
Wing, tooth, and nail
In the ongoing battle
Of social soliloquy
Coraline

I am seven years old
Running from clay and metal
Spiders on cinema screens
Having far past my limit
For scary stories
Strangely shaped shadows
Had been plaguing my sleep
As intrusive ideas where I sat
Stuck in webbed marionette strings
The cruel Fates weaved
I saw the skittering brown legs of the unknown
Curled in the corner of my room
And screamed for stability
I am over twenty years old
Less prone to night terrors now
My subconscious seeming more odd than off
Intrigue winning over age old instinct
I will not button my eyes
Or stitch my mouth
In fear of what may enter them both
The horror has not changed me
Like I expected it to
Glass Canopy

Hanging on a hook
Above my first big girl bed
A decade or more ago
Was a curtain of white
It hung from a hoop
In silky see-through sweeps
Trapping my giggling little form
In their loose shimmering hold
I ducked underneath it
And pulled the shutters tight
To transport myself
To other dimensions
Where the blurry blue bedroom walls
Could be open impossible sky
I was a fey king
Or wandering knight
Or a creature beyond my playmates and parents
Puny ponderings
As I settled in and absorbed
All the impossible things
I wanted to be
I don't know where it ended up
Eventually
As I got used to staring
At barren ceilings
Having to squeeze my eyes shut tight
To see the stars again
My walls are smoke steel gray now
Reflecting the northwestern sky
I'll never need to imagine
I don't need a curtain to cover
My senses any longer
As my mind unfocuses into far off lands
Whenever I please
I've grown out of the need
For story books
I can finally write
My worldview

Alt Text: The edge of a glass canopy over an unseen walkway.
Conceal Carry

Rage is something
I can only still wield
With the written word
I've had to hide it well
For fear of my champagne glass tower life
Shattering at the slightest raise of my voice
It has morphed in form
To keep you happy
Locking cruel lash outs in my armory
Leaving behind silence and infuriating sympathy
You laugh at the ugly tears of frustration I cry instead
Burning tracks into my face and memory
I don't forget the pain so easily
It is cataloged here
In a myriad of pristine pages
That you can't hide from anymore
Did you think I gave up?
Stopped feeling?
Stopped holding grudges like knives just because
you couldn't see them?
You are the silencer
To my smoking gun
Maybe you can keep me quiet and hidden
But you can't stop the recoil
On the hand that points me forwards
Nor can you stop the bullet holes
That leave permanent reminders
Of who I will always be
There will be an impact
I will exist freely and fucking angrily
Even if some only see it as tragedy
And if my meaning destroys you
Then so be it
Aphrodite: Goddess of Self Love

Every morning I pray
At my wardrobe altar
For guidance
And beguiling
Sifting through the racks and drawers
Of its varied treasure trove
Searching for my ever shifting
Sense of self
Among the fabric
I revel and reek of it
Of mothballs
And lint
And cardboard
And maybe I should have washed this more thoroughly
Carefully choosing between
Barely there traces
Of my mother’s shampoo
And my father’s detergent
There’s every color here
Kaleidoscoped together
From seafoam
To love letter ink
To blood
Harsh lines and soft gradients
Fades and washes mixing into obscurity
I pair my clothes carefully

Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of pink and white flowers on a tree.
And clashingly
Choosing between
Boyish girl
Girlish boy
And god
With flowing silk
Shaping cords and corsets
Teasing see through lace
Denim billowing like eighties movie curtains
I dart between bedroom and bathroom mirror
Looking at the lines of my body
Playing with their lengths
Before finishing off
With finger tight leather
Closing around me in an embrace
I’ll never stop craving
The bowstring bends
The arrow strikes true
But I’m lost
In my own glittering eyes
Forgive and Never Forget

Jesus and I
Meet every Sunday evening
On the concrete roof
Of my apartment building
We complain about the government
And laugh about the weather
Until the sun rises
I watch him shiver
Still unaccustomed to Pacific winters
We lean into each other
His sheeps wool sweater itching my skin
Legs dangling
As he rubs the scars on his hands
While I wipe the tears from his eyes
And we remind ourselves
That life goes on
We write the names of our first lovers
On notebook paper to burn
And try not to think of last kisses
We linger as long as we can
In the stars
Avoiding the wooden weight
Of responsibility
Against our spines
I share some Tylenol when we head inside
For the migraines that started up
After the crown first dug into his temples
And we hug for a long time
His chapped mouth presses into my brow
As he whispers that love hurts
When wielded by heavenly fire
I bury my face somewhere under his jaw
And tell him he deserved a better father
When he leaves I sit on my kitchen floor
And write all the imperfect poetry
Of our hearts
That will never leave his tongue
Because I may have gotten free
Of false gods
And expectations
But he never will
It’ll be alright though
I can pray enough for the both of us
Loving Phobias

A spider lives under my skin
It hatched in my upper arm
A decade and a half ago
And decided to stay
It skitters its way through my veins
Wherever it pleases
My skin tingling
Muscles spasming
Uncomfortable always
If used to the intrusion
It’s made its web
Somewhere between my lungs
I didn’t realize
I had heartstrings
Until it played them
Like a harp
Plucking strings
In discordant harmony
I’ve tried to tear it out
Digging nails into my flesh
Dragging harsh lines
Over its familiar pathways
I’ve even sucked at my open cavities
But no matter how much
Its webbing wraps my joints together
Its venom stains my appetite
And eight eyes

Alt Text: Thin trees with draping branches, lit up from the sun, crossing over a blue sky.
Gaze at my insides
Skillful and patient
And hungry
We are inseparable now
Even if it's tied up warnings of danger
Pull too hard at my shaky diaphragm
I don't blame it
For choosing my restless body
As its home
Instinct drove it
As much as its threads —
Drive me.
All we can do
Is learn to live
With the fear
And one another
Things I Learned In Between Lectures

Hope is like an empty whiteboard marker
It only truly works
When you are desperate
Ready to shake the plastic foundations
Of your reality
To bang it on the table
In frustration
Spilling pigment flakes and powder
Over aching fingertips
To add water
Breathe
And recenter
Until you can finally
Put the felt tip
Of your desires
To the wall
And let them bleed out
Into oversaturated
Synthetic smelling
Relief
It will never be the color you aimed for
But at least the blank uncaring aluminum
Won’t win
Alt Text: A concave, red building with rows of neat, rectangular windows.
TOXIC RELATIONSHIP

I'm sorry I never listen
When you snarl
Clenching around my spine
Like a mass of coiled snakes
I'm sorry I hated the brown of your eyes
Until all too recently
Taking the woods for granted
As I sighed dreamily over oceans
And emeralds
Ignoring you and reality as one
I'm sorry that I forget
To clean up when you ask
I can see the mess of red and grime
As your scattered protest
Over my skin
And I am often too tired
To agree
I'm sorry that some days
I wish you were a magazine
That I could turn into a cut up collage
Adding padding to shoulders
And snipping away at hips and breasts
Until I'm cursing the genetics you can't help
either
For not letting me look like my father
I'm sorry that neither of us are what we wanted
But what I want to purge from my head

Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of a branch with spiky leaves, silhouetted against a blue sky.
Should not be taken out on my body
So can we just turn the lights off
And lay back
And I'll promise to try?
I promise I'll try
If I Could Try Again

The world will tell you that your words are useless
But you’ll watch your first real best friend go stunned when you read him your poetry every single time
The adults don’t make sense, and they never will, so give up on listening
Your Nana loves you, but she cannot understand your love
Cock your eyebrow at the people who question you
Like all those book characters you adore
Cause they are the ones being idiots
You don’t have to listen
The world will not trust you
Do not let it convince you not to trust yourself
Let every mote of joy brimming in your chest be the only god you ever need
When someone hurts you, the hurt matters, don’t give me that shit about it being your fault, it still hurts
Bold lines only exist when you are the one setting them around yourself
Be proud, not relieved
You have earned every breath you will ever take already
Burn so bright that when you are gone, you
supernova
Leave something unique and impossibly vast behind
Let the world fall to its knees and regret ever thinking of touching you

Alt Text: Green metal staircase railings going up the side of a building.
Generational Taste

I was raised
On the symphony
Of an existential crisis
My parents passively teaching me
Through their own breakdowns
And breakouts
And breaks
They were still wild children
When I became their child
Rocking out to Radiohead
Sobbing to Built to Spill
Dancing to The White Stripes
Cutting ties to Death Cab for Cutie
Randy Described Eternity was needle pressed
Onto my vinyl soul
Knowledge of philosophers
Lulling me to sleep
Bass guitar so loud
It settled permanently into my throat
With me stuttering words that fall off center
From it's ever present beat
I have experienced every emotion twice
Once through the music
Of my parent's life story album tour
That they wrote together
Before pursuing solo careers
And once more
Firsthand
Through the vibrations of my own vocal cords
Reverberating back down to my bones
Deep enough to burn their lyrics in
For good
I am an old soul they say
Forever a fan of the complex
Broken voiced melodies
I am the same age they were
When they had me
The 90’s cloak me
In flannel and eye bags
And well thought out anarchy
That I stole from dresser drawers
But I am still so young
Looking for words to my feelings
That only scratched records
And cracking speakers
Can play back to me
Poetry is Fucking Hard
Sometimes

Writing about a block
Is something I've never tried before
On principle
An eye can only look forwards
And the problem is stuck
Behind both of mine
So why bother defining it?
But god I can still feel it
Sharp and angular
Four points cutting
Into the corners of my creativity
Like needles in skin
Painless but precise
Stretching out
Central processing connections
In my skull
Too compact
For the cubic space it takes up
It's a six sided black hole
Sucking in all my pretty words
And thought provoking themes
Leaving me with nothing but
Loathsome stream of consciousness
And metaphors I know by heart
But don't believe in
The refracting light
Of the outside
That usually fuels me
Disappears into the dark
Deeper than my pupils
Can register
I am staring at a blank white
Laptop screen
Blinking cursor teasing
And begging me
To connect the dots
To dive in
To write one single fucking word
But it isn’t a canvas so much
As a mirror anymore
We stare at each other
Blinking in dumb silence
Equally unable to do
What we were coded for
A Changing of Roles

I've been thinking about
The dynamic you're most fond of lately
The cosmic edges of your kinks
Bleeding into your busy schedule
As the thorny vines of your attention
Are ensnared by my simple human pleasures
Look at us
Me
The semi willing exhibitionist
You
The all too knowing voyeur
As it's been since the beginning
You watch from every corner and cross
Taking in the sights
As I prostrate myself
At a very different altar
For your greedy eyes alone
But you know me
And after all this time
I've gotten inevitably curious
What would you do
If I switched our roles?
A day in my shoes
Under my chains
Held in my arms
With everyone looking at you?
We'd paint such a pretty picture
Spread out on the Sistine Chapel ceiling
Or pinned against
A Vatican wall
Would you meet their stares
Moaning
Open mouthed
Or would I need to blind you
Gag you
Cover your ears with my thighs
So you don't have to feel
The world you've made
Judge you back

Alt Text: A flat building with two high rises on either side, creating a geometric U shape.
Beautiful

You wield the word
Beautiful
Like a rifle
Aimed under my ribs
Each comment leaving shrapnel
Shattered confidence too
The bullets are reminders
Of what I am to you
And hiding the pain with smiles and gratitude
Makes it hard
To put pressure on the wounds
I am beautiful
Don’t be mistaken
But like a far off place
A forgotten painting
I am curves and angles
Someone’s pretty boy slut
And I love my body and mind
Like they are sunsets and home
But your definition
Is different from mine
I am the expanse
And you look eagerly around
For a box
Walls tightening in
Washing out my multitude of colors
In favor of
Tying me down
With pretty pink bows
Like the metal I wear around my neck
My waist
My fingers
Adorning and accenting
My limitless form
Instead of my friends picking out
The broken pieces of lead
For months afterwards
I am beautiful
But I am not your kind of beautiful
And maybe you should move on
To the next gallery
Before you get out your paintbrush
Certain in you bravado
That you can do better
Flashbang

I always imagined
Poetry to be a
Patient practice
Late nights filled with
Languid loose tongues
Of inspiration
Flowing over bodies and pages
In slow and sexy
Hedonism
Planned out foreplay building
To a climactic conclusion
But my methods
Seem not to follow this theme
Apollo prefers
To take me hard and fast
In hand
Tattooing an idea
Into my shoulder
With his teeth
As he drags me
To broom closets
And back alleys.
He's eager to jump in my lap
Drop to his knees
And drink in
My ink lined noises
Of ecstasy
The finished set
Of metaphors and alliteration
Pulses through my body
All too soon
Spilling onto hot
Eager skin
Sometimes he edges me
Giving me just a few segments
And keeping me on the brink for hours
Before the rest follows in a rush
He licks his lips
Aurum irises filled with
Singeing satisfaction
Before he leaves me
To clean up the mess
As fast as we both came
My muse is not kind
But he’s far from ineffective
And I live waiting
Watching the world carefully
Parsing out
My next fleeting moments
Of pleasure

Alt Text: Continued from last page.
THE THINGS WE'VE DONE TO EACH OTHER

Look at us
Skin-stolen
As we huddle
In impressions of each other
If I kiss you with your own lips
Do you feel it in my nerves?
Tongue-tight promises
Etched in the wrong set
Of smiles
We are both uncomfortable
For different reasons
Lash me to your lash-outs
And brand me with your bittersweetness
If you drink too much
Of anything
It’s poison
And I thought I needed you
Like water
Cough-syrup-sweet
But I was the medicine
You were downing
For a disease I only encouraged
The symptoms of
You loved the high
Too much to care
Soul-swallowed
In desperate gulps
Until all I was
Was a part of you
Bone-bits bursting
As I ripped myself away
And we're both bleeding
I've got no more
Organs to give up
Was it worth it?
Making me lend you
My burning heart
And pretending that it's yours?

Alt Text: A split tree, with ragged grain, zoomed in to highlight the texture.
The 22nd Annual Masquerade

Who are you?
The invitation asks
And every year
The colors I choose to RSVP with
Clash with what I actually wear.
Days before the ceremony
I am scrambling
Matching soul and skin tone
Swatches in the mirror
Is TARDIS blue making a comeback?
The accent tone I stubbornly cling to
All of a decade?
Not quite
Parchment and ruffles for the Bard?
Faery rings on every finger?
No more than usual
A feather in my mask
For every angel that tried
And failed to keep me?
Of course
But dove or peacock?
Silver or gold?
Gods or god complexes?
New pain or hand me down quirks?
Love or nostalgia?
I dress in extravagant new faces
With each new waltz
But certain friends and lovers
Can spot me from across the ballroom
In seconds
I am an ADHD set of identities
And interests
But the form will never change
Consistent contradiction
Giving meaning
To brown eyes
Crooked smiles
And my own oddly
Predictable lines

Alt Text: Continued from last page.
Thrifting

My mother is a silent wasteland
A carefully curated junkyard
Filling her head
And home
And child
Cigarette butts stashed
Under cracked car windows
Smudged but no longer smoldering
Scratched records
In faded color cases
But the record player
Left in the divorce
Cherry wood floors
Stacked up in boxes still
Meant to match
A dead dogs shedded fur
French language textbooks
Next to bibles
Both left behind to dusty academia
Her unfinished projects
Stretch from horizon to horizon
She collects them quietly
The only words spoken
Stashed tightly between her earbuds
She watches the sun paint
Brown to gold eyes
Burning with alchemy
Waiting to guide assured hands
To table legs
To college classes
To stubborn but still malleable clients
Every day closer
To the next masterpiece
Of her choosing
I'm a scrawny kid made scrawnier
By concave shoulders
And a bluebell-stem spine
Pick, die, grow, repeat
Pretend to be the kind of beauty
That lasts
Am I infinitesimal to you yet?
Some days I have
The see-through
Steel covered
Confidence of the Louvre
Forgetting that oil paints bleed
And my pyramid is made of glass
Delicacies can only hold power
In metaphor
So I make music
My shield
Superglued headphones
My own deprivation tank
Floating in a piano riff
I've half forgotten
Dream Sweet in Sea Major
Or was it violin?
People are coagulating symphonies
And I am hanging on to every cord
Sneaking Under My Skin
Lyrics rewritten
With every beat of my heart
The Blood In The Cut
That I’ve collected
Pulled by careful bloodletting
Squeezing leeches dry.
For my regurgitated affection.
All Day I Dream About
Loves and lovers
Moving through movies
Of sequestered soundtrack playlists
Play, pause, skip, repeat
The subconscious made my own
Anthropological excavation
Watching the world
From where it can’t break me
My bedroom door locked tight
Half the walls windows
At my mind’s leisure.

Body Hungover in the City of Dust
The moon snaking through slitted blinds
The only eye that sees me
And I meet its gaze
Knowing when I write
My sonnets to it
It’ll never say
I Love You Too.
In Order to Confront Death

Empty eye sockets
Gaze at me
From every corner of my room
I pull the tarot card deliberately
Thumbing over faceless paper
Until the ink bleeds
Femur bones fitted to my fingertips
Pickled examples
Of eternal sleep
When it comes to the end
I am scientist and pagan and poet
Sleeping with skeletons
Caging bone as bones cage me
Thanatos the black winged muse
Charon the destined companion
Hades the will writer
The River Lethe my worst enemy
Let me change forever
Shapeshifter and collector
I want to remember
Every pair of wings I’ve flown with
Every shift of my twisting teeth
Every bit of grave dirt
Underneath my fingernails
I will become vampiric
Gorey torment in endless war
With careful scythes to end stagnation
If you take my calcified heart
I will keep every moment of this
If it kills me

Alt Text: Silhouetted branches over a pale blue sky.
Halloween

No horror allowed
In my household
But the ghosts
Still lingered
I had so many masks to wear
But you still left me catering
By the door
Cotton cobwebs
Wrapped giddily round
Arachnophobic fingers
You were shocked at
My love for blood
When I watched it pour from brows
And bones
Of gory messiahs plastered
Over the heads of preachers
With their own coffins
To nail shut
Big eyed ebony bats
And wicked long tongue butterflies
Love and fear in equal measure
The least scary thing about life
Will always be
The devils October nights
My black cat
Was never nearly as unlucky
As I was
Peripheral

The practiced tilt of my head
The sharp countertop edge
Of my hips
The music
The movement
Your teeth are far sharper than mine
My cryptozoology
Involves asking you
To peel back the skin
And take notes
The unfamiliar
The uncanny
The umbra
Shadows on the planes
Of my face
Am I shifting again
Or were you just looking too long?
Lucy

A third of a ribcage
Half the sharp pelvic wing
One leg in total
And a shrapnel skull
I didn't want to see this
Coerced through exhibit cases
Filled with evidence
My family let King James
Drape over with literal lettering
I've since run my hands
Over femurs
Feeling the weight
Of thousands of years
Of perfect accidents
I can feel her in my jawline
My fingertips
The animal in my anthropology
The primordial birth
Of my agnosticism
Alt Text: Trees with red flowers amongst green leaves against a blue sky.
Orange

The first fight
I ever unknowingly
Took a side for
Was the color
Of the dining room walls
A mothers decision
I never understood
Her sunrises and sunsets
To my indigo twilights
Baking in late California sun
That was too far south to touch
Now it's throw pillows
And pithy peels
In bitter bourbon bites
She never burns
And my pale green veins
Are learning to glow
Tree-sap sunlight
Sinking in
Amber slowed mind
Reminding me
To enjoy it
Silver Tongue

You warned me when you saw them
Flinching at the heat
As their white hot
Silver tongue
Dribbled lying compliments
On our shared lunch table
We'd both been burned before
But I was too young to understand
That burning and warmth
Weren't the same
So I fell into their carefully worded cage
Letting them brand hate onto my skin
With their mouth
Instead of asking for them to touch me
With loving hands like we both knew they
 wouldn't
Here's your chance for I told you so's
All well deserved
But I'd rather we talk
And cheer each other on
No matter where or who we were
Like we used to
Despite all my flaking skin
And flinching smile
Can we go back to simpler times
That can't be misconstrued
When you told me you loved me
And it was actually true
Older

I grew up terrified
Of doing just that
And every tired eyed adult
I knew
Laughed like bitter wine
And agreed
I coveted my childhood
Like stained glass
I would one day
Be only able to look at
Instead of feel
My fear only dragged that future sooner
And soon I was more future than present
Wrapping barbed wire
Around my head
To keep the real world out
I have my own apartment now
But all the medieval cathedral colors
Are even brighter than before
There is still ice cream
And water fights
And cartoons
And sunlight
I am more solid now
Then she used to be
Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of a budding plant with red tips on the top most leaves.
Bottle

I want to bottle this moment
Like a ship
Spending hours
With instructions
Weaving masts
And slotting panels together
I want to take my time
With you
To memorize this down
To the taste of the sea air
The wood under my bare feet
So I can set it down in stark detail
To one side
In the corner of my eye
For as long as I breathe
I am something
When people are watching
Clothed in old books
And impulses
There's a collection of faces
I keep on the wall
To remind me
Of my own
I solidify in your presence
Gaseous nebula
Into stars you can name
That die and unmake themselves
When you aren't paying attention
How many black holes pockmark my attention?
Sucking sense of self
Down the drain
Until further notice
I am my own ghost
Less aware of my vessel
Then I should be
Possessing a body I am used to
But often forget
And every moment unaware
Is an exorcism
I ask you every day what I am
So I can know too
Vessel

Look at the veins
Under your hands
Pathways of protruding greens
Snaking like vines
Between skin and muscle
Spreading from bone
Like wandering legs
We are all a kind of spider web
Carefully wrapped
Around our multi eyed core
Stronger than we look
But still flimsy enough
For a stray wind
Or cruel fingers
Or one wrong stitch
To unravel us completely
Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of dead vines covering a concrete divider.
Free Will

I don't know if it's the old Irish blood
Or the kind of fatigue
That could only exist
In present day
But I'm alright
Being the creature in the wood's
Next victim
Let me lie in faery rings
And be lost to time
Picked up by eldritch beings
Looking for souls to burn
Being a plaything for gods
Would be better
If I got to pick my puppeteers
They can take my art in return
What are my pretty words for
If not to be heard?
At least the fey
Would want me to write
Like I should
I just want the luxury of existence
Tasting food I didn't earn
Allowed to watch the realm
And let it watch me
In turn
I crave the simplicity
Of living and dying
As something real
Let me choose the mythological
I know it's tricks

Alt Text: A dead tree, crumbling from termite damage, with a small plant grow from the very top.
Oh, Tacoma

Ask me where I’m from
City of Destiny
They call us
On account of our rusty
Railroad track nerves
We rattle past suburbs
Graffiti tattooed to our mismatched skin
And they crinkle turned up noses
In contempt
We are something you find
Not choose
Blowing glass
From our grit
And finding solace in sawdust
This is the place
Where bridges gallop
And our foundation is wet clay
Turning desperate fingers
Madrona red
We are not the empire
We were supposed to be
And not the empty hallowed ground
People expect
We are miners digging
For emeralds in sea glass
The blackberries bursting
From concrete parking lots

Alt Text: The converted wall in an empty lot, surrounded by trees.
The smoky ghosts
better left unburied
The last laugh
To Want

There are two kinds of devotion
I’d like to think
The kind where you’re so committed
To your love
That when you’re done devouring flesh
You snap the bone between your teeth
And drink the marrow
Still hungering for more
And the kind where you stare and stare
But never touch
A rope of social obligation and velvet
Keeping you tied up and split apart
Afraid your fingers
Will add oil to the brushwork
That was never intended by god
Alt Text: Pink flowers shadowed against a blue sky.
PATIENCE RUNNING THIN

I'm an addict
With a dream
Running short
On other peoples fumes
Pretty words
Prettier moans
Orgasmic highs made
Woefully routine
I have never touched
Another human being
In the ways I've already
Twisted myself
Into knots
I've got two hands
A wifi connection
And a damn good imagination
But I'm on a thin line
Close to snapping
Tightrope walker falling
Headfirst into lust
I want skin between my teeth
Breaths between thighs
Scratches and bruises
To keep me company for the lonely
Days that follow
I am millimeters close
To spilling over
Praying to be caught
On someone's tongue
Lapped up
And drunk dry
It's a curse being shy
Lips sealed shut
And mind far too low
In my guts
Taking every pressing denim seam
Or stray breeze
As a barely acceptable
Alternative
Do you know what it's like
To spend years
Edged out
On the brink?
It's a feedback loop
Of fresh insanity
Looking to know
Someone other than me
Biblically
Let the ink spill
And seep
Let the lovers one day
Find me
So I can stop swallowing
Urges down
And start tasting
Glory
Mexico Beach Memoir

The sidewalk wouldn't take us there
So we braved burrs
And fire ants
And burning pavement
For an ocean that was right
Outside our door
A manta ray waved at me
With shark finned wings
From either side
Of our kayak
I made labyrinths in the sand
And danced between bayou streams
Binged every low rez season
Of Astro Boy
Tangled christmas lights
On potted palm trees
Learned the midnight hum
Of chorus frogs in the abyssal
Atlantic night
Celebrated birthdays with friends
I would never see again
The hurricane took the duplex
But not the foundation
We were in Florida
The one year
They thought it might snow
Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of red dirt, packed together.
Dear Dionysus

When you were roaming
The countryside
Maddened by worse
Than your own wine
Comforted only
By dresses meant
For fairer sex
Did you feel the same
Way I do
When a baggy shirt
Stabilizes me
Swallowing the curves
I’d rather forget?
And when you were Zagreus
Golden child
Torn apart and remade
From ashes and still
Beating immortal
Heart
Turned from heir
To last olympian
Perfection to wild
Impropriety
Did the others
Also assume
That you were the same
Pre-frankensteined
Almost disappointed
You’d changed?
But what else were we
Supposed to do?
Shatter under the heat
Like ill prepared glass
Or learn to bend?
Enveloped

Let me crawl in your mouth
And live in your throat
Lulled to sleep by the hum
Of your vocal cords
Against my spine
The tip of my tongue
Pressed into the top
Of a raspberry
Seeing how much of me
It could take
Before splitting
At the seams
Is it wrong
To want to be swaddled
Or swallowed
Preferred death
By boa constrictor?
How am I meant
To stay real
And also
Untethered?
I won't practice
But I'll play
My violin
In concerto
With a broken finger
My motivation
Has been bedridden
Wasting away
Under the sheets
But leaping up and ignoring
Aching joints
Whenever stagnation
Becomes impossible
You can sift through
The orchestra
And find me playing
Second chair
Like the devil himself
Desperate and golden
And all for show
I'm rarely anything
When I'm alone
Alt Text: A zoomed in picture of a sculpted metal mask, with harsh geometric designs, colored in brown.