Direction to Water

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Grief

A whitetail deer lies whole beside the road—whole, except the heart casement. Alive, except the ribs picked bare.

Like an interactive diagram:
  What flesh lies behind this hide?
Lift the panel.
  What truth in bone beyond that?
Lift the panel.
  What death bellows beneath?
Lift your eyes to the disheveled vultures, and let their shadows smooth the burnt ache from your cheekbones in reassurance you too are whole, except.

In June

Ribbed basalt shears the shrub steppe, and sun glares off the Columbia into caves on cliff faces, smothering the bleat of big horned sheep.

Grazing darkness closely, until every rock lies bleached, the Sun welcomes Death. She daily pulls him from the shadows—those damp branches where pillbugs roil in post-coital ecstasy.
Sister Chauffeur

The passenger-side visor broke two weeks ago.

Driving into evening, I reach out and scoop sunlight from her eyes.

I feel the yellow sky pulse in my palm.

As our hair winds together and out the windows, my arm aches to hold the sun in place.

Dagger, lance, & lily

Dagger, lance, and lily; organ pipes splayed as angel wings or a rib-cage cracked like crab shell—these are the images of my religion.

I place them in my grandmother’s travel trunk and collect bumper stickers—offerings for scarred panelling, wrinkled hands open just like hers.
Driving While You Sleep

Rain swells over the windshield wipers, each tidal wave part of a bead curtain that streaks the glass and blurs the night, and I trace every rivulet to its end, floating up with each away from the murky headlights and our loosely linked hands that rest, limp, on your thigh. I drift free from my knot of veins, woven like kelp, to the surface, where I touch the empty sky for the first time since we met (when your gray eyes submerged me like a prophecy, an end-time flood that sweeps mountains and mingles orcas with the evergreens we’re passing by). Now the rain’s dark patter echoes through space, overwhelming your sighs, those siren exhalations that would anchor me beside you. So my care floats, unmoored, on the surface of Love as I draw my hand from yours to adjust the windshield wipers so I can see the road.

Nightlight

As a child I was afraid of Monsters in the dark.
As a woman I am afraid of Men—both boast that same burst-egg-yolk-glow of teeth, which seeps through the evening onto my pillow.
I knew poetry by texting:

as every girl learns,  
the cosmos depend  
on placement of a period.

Is it too abrupt a way  
to end a sentence?  
Is the sentence too loose  
without?  
Am I?

Length, of course, is critical—never  
to exceed two lines.

I liked prose a plenty, but  
the boys preferred witticisms,  
and even the geese

had greater tolerance  
for my odes, graciously  
contorting their proud necks  
to accept (punctuated) flattery  
of their unprecedented ability  
to show up, if only once a year,

on time.
Neighbor

I.
A carton of eggs is strewn beside
stuttering traffic: one yolk smeared yellow
parallel to the fog line, nine safe in membrane,
shell, & divot, and two peering out from thin cracks
like watchers from the covered bus stop each November.

II.
The flour landed, presumably with a squelch,
on the other side of the guard rail in a boot print
path that schlups up to a dozen mismatched blues.

III.
One tarp shelter has a bonafide wooden door—
on hinges, in a frame, stoop stuck in the mud
—the type of door you’d knock on to ask
a neighbor for eggs.

IV.
The type of neighbor who accepts your city’s
late night practice of a Symphony for Horns
without noise complaint, whom you never learn
the name of and know only
for the door between you.
Mother’s Day, 2018

for Breton

Windows whistling, we lurch along a backwoods road, its shoulder grown over in blackberry brambles. Along telephone wires, brass-breasted robins are strung, and laundry flops in the backseat. We friends enter Spring and Lynden simultaneously.

—There, the two drooling cats witness from a gray porch as we climb moss-limbed cherry trees and geese patrol fallow fields. Your mom’s lilacs lean heavy against the hayloft ladder.

You twirl me on the barn swing, woven by your great uncles, gleaming like buttercups in a mote-spiraled shaft of evening light.

Snap.

Coffee percolates on iron stovetop, and I watch on as you tell father, tell sister, what happened to the rope. This bloom, there is no one else to receive apology.
Hiking Deception Pass

If I turn as a flower to the sun
and face the path behind me,
halting for a breath
that does not hiss—
If I let sweat roll down
the culvert of my spine
from under the blue band
of my sports bra, let it roll exposed
and glistening in the light,
luminous as the dew
dripping from leaf to leaf
above us—If I do so,
then you will see my red red face
or my white white back webbed
with stretch marks.
And I will feel the sun shine
on my skin and wind enter
my lungs, but I will also feel
ashamed.

Ashamed of the meadows
that are my unshaven legs
and the snowcapped slope
that is my stomach,
of the gasps that see me to the summit
and of my own bodied reminder
of the wild.

So I do not stop and turn
or pull the fabric from my flesh.
Because I, too, am a wilderness,
but not the type you’re here to see.
Bridge Pose Anthem

This is an anthem for the fat women in bridge pose in a yoga center in Hyderabad—for the spiny pain flooding their upper backs, incessant as monsoon or the mewling of peacocks and hotter than their sticky room where every fan hangs silent because “All yoga is hot yoga in the Deccan.”

This is an anthem for their sweat, decadent, for the wealth of it, purling down the true arch of their spines as they pulse forward sparkling like Golconda diamonds. An anthem for the women who wonder if they wouldn’t rather be fat than here—fuck it—this is an anthem for me, the only fat woman here.

For the way my rolls levitate like yogis, are abducted by an alien gravity that doesn’t yet know fat women aren’t supposed to float.

For the six seconds left and the breath coming steamy and jagged like boar track on my orange-sand soccer field.

Three seconds.

A meditation on cake frosting.

One.

For the way I plunge into the muddy Ganga beneath my bridge, the pose dissolving in a viscous splash.

This is an anthem for my body and the fact that it’s still here.
Blood Orange

Light pollution unfurls
like an orange peel, discarded
on the horizon.

One segment stays stuck
to the wet-smoke sky—the moon
is half-empty, colored
in California flame,
and fires murmur
on either side of the asphalt.

Our interstate, though,
is doused in the security
of your asthmatic snores
as I glaze past every exit
and drive toward
the citrus promise
of a safer, blood orange dawn.

August

Droplets thrum across the mind’s waxy leaves,
and bodies tangle like prayer candle smoke
rising from the orange-painted base
of a neem tree and catching
in the veined underside
of diamond sheafs and filtered light.

Branches tremble under monsoon rain,
and he above her does the same,
streams thick into this red-mud body
she calls her own.

They are dusted in fireflies and lightning’s
violent, violet cry; while drowned in same waters,
they are mindless of the departing
menagerie, the ark.
Ghazal: Honeyed Lips

Come hear the magic of
trap door lips!
Enter the sworded space below
false-floor lips.

Hive whisperings swarm to
the new gal in town—
the heady summer buzz
of red allure lips.

Campfire-lit cigarettes and flesh-
eating monster stories
pass thru drunk girlfriends’
folklore lips.

Horrors abound about
a boy we know—
his Midwestern-storm-ey eyes
and his carnivore lips.

Penning is so permanent, tongue
left static in prose:
what calls it to lies, love,
and war? Lips.

When the bees are stingin’ your heart,
Princess,
stop your crying, light a match, and hon-
ney your lips.