

Bereave in Yourself

by

Natalia Fiore

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Sponser: Monica Ferrell

Second Reader: Anthony Domestico

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Bereave in Yourself is a collection of poetry I have written and edited over the course of the last four years. It explores my relationship with mental health, body image, identity, family, and trauma. The definition of “bereave” is to take away or to deprive of something. In my poetry I attempt to take away from events that replay over and over so as to understand them in a better light. *Bereave in Yourself* also touches on the somber attitude of this work, dealing with ambiguous grief when it comes to identity or estranged family members. Each section contains a group of poems that focus on these struggles, one by one until my last section in which I come to some sort of resolution. Everything is connected, from specific familial relationships to my mental health which is also reflected in body image which is all part of my identity. These poems have really helped me to know what about myself has been stuck in one place and how I can try to move forward in a more appreciative way.

My writing style consists of varying forms and styles and my poems are usually written in first or second person. While I tend to write about my life and experiences, I aim to include the reader in these scenarios as best I can. There are multiple poems written in second person form that take a commanding voice, telling the reader what to do. This can be seen in poems such as “all that dazzling sun has put you asunder,” in which stanzas open with lines like, “Listen closely” and “Fold yourself into the waves”. This directs the reader to immediately understand the character of Icarus in this poem, falling with him to the ground to question whether hubris really causes demise. In a way I am guiding myself and the reader through these poems, as a way to piece together my version of things.

It’s also in a sort of flipped ending, or taking out of the original setting that I write. This happens frequently in a state of memory, only to be pulled back into a harsher reality. In “Car Freshener” and “Exhaust Fan,” the narrator’s memory is triggered by smells that remind them of

their brother. One space becomes a memory, before harshly turning back into reality. “Easter Sunday” also does this by beginning in a completely different state before turning back to reality. It begins with the narrator “wearing black mary janes” in a funeral home spiraling and then coming upon the last stanza “wearing black combat boots” to realize the person they were mourning is very much alive. I want to create that jarring ending as a way to gain attention back and maybe spur a second read.

Finally, in addition to loving to use alliteration and imagery in my work, I have a habit of stating facts. This comes through in the form of animal facts, which occurs in several poems in this collection and outside of it. The second stanza in “Toothache” begins with the question: “Did you know that sharks have the ability to continuously regrow their teeth?” before stating that they do indeed lose 30,000 in their lifetime. From this, the narrator incorporates this fact into their own experience. Another example is in “Autohaemorrhaging,” opening with two stanzas about the West Indian wood snake’s defense mechanism. This is then turned around completely in another tidbit that the narrator learns about their brother. The stark contrast between these natural facts and facts about my own trauma contributes again to these poems flipping the script. Talking again about bereavement as an act of taking away, I turn these things that feel in the moment so far from reality back into reality. It’s a way for the reader to understand the situation as a jarring one and to cope with it themselves as it so quickly turns around.

My influences come from works such as *Crush* by Richard Siken, *Black Aperture* by Matt Rasmussen, and *If Not Winter: Fragments of Sappho* translated by Anne Carson. As a queer writer, I connect with both Richard Siken and Sappho not only in their queerness but in their stunning wordplay and imagery that is written in a way that is simple and easy to understand. In Siken’s poem “Dirty Valentine,” he describes in detail a film that the narrator and the you are

filming. In a list of simple phrases, such as “ ballroom dancing ,/fancy clothes and waterlilies in the pond,” the reader is immediately set in a scene of extravagance and mystery. There are so many images in this poem with heavy enjambment, images that address a lover while also addressing the narrator. There is a duality in the abundance of beauty and the subjects of the poem that ends in a way that is so jarring: “I’m sorry. We know how it works. The world is no longer mysterious.”

In Anne Carson’s translation of Sappho, she is able to do a similar thing but in such a short amount of words. One fragment reads, “Eros shook my/ mind like a mountain wind falling on oak trees”. In one line, this fragment describes desire in such a raw and direct way that is enviable. I try to emulate this power in my own imagery, while also trying to create something that makes someone do a double take.

When I read Matt Rasmussen’s book *Black Aperture*, I cried. It is a collection of poems written in response to his brother’s suicide. While I had not experienced the same things he had, there were so many themes and ways that the poems were written that resonated with me. There is one poem in particular, “After Suicide [A hole is nothing],” that I think about all the time. In it, he describes his brother standing in front of an open refrigerator drinking milk that was dripping through the hole in his head onto the floor. There is something so harsh and real about that image, and the poem being written completely in couplets was simple and to the point that felt like it was gasping with each stanza. There is a line in my poem “Car Freshener” that reads, “It’s milk. Spilled down my brother’s chin/ and onto the floor.” which was inspired by this poem. This book definitely helped me understand how to write about trauma in a way that was eye-opening, and helped me through it as well.

Other inspirations include my previously mentioned animal facts, Emily Dickinson, and my hobby of collecting toys and dolls. My poem “My Life Stands, a Loaded Gun” was written originally for an assignment where we had to respond to an Emily Dickinson poem of our choice. Like my interest in relating animal facts to my life, I did the same with that poem. There is a reality in Emily Dickinson’s work that is not directly spoken about but is masked in a sense of vagueness. But even in that, she is able to invoke such emotion through them. I have poems where I aim to be specific and others where the narrator hides behind the poem to invite the reader to make an assumption of the situation. I think both of these techniques are valuable, and it definitely helped me branch out into new types of writing.

As for my hobby, it shows up in just two poems: “One-Trick Pony” and “Ariel’s Grotto, Magic Kingdom, 2005.” There are many reasons why I collect toys and dolls, mostly because I like them but there is definitely a sense of nostalgia and lost childhood that they invoke in my everyday life and in these poems. In speaking through them as inanimate objects or things with semblance, I am able to revisit memories that I may have left behind while also creating new memories with them. “One-Trick Pony” depicts the narrator caring for the toy, wondering about its possibly existent feelings and again stating facts. The sixth stanza reads, “She is dotted with bruises./These brown marks on vinyl can be caused by a reaction to sulfur,/exposure to chlorine, and colonies of fungi./Fungus is most likely the cause./This makes her more alive, I think.” Circling back to my love of stating facts in my work, it reflects my manner to focus deeply on a certain thing and share it and directly tie it in with my own reality. This creates a juxtaposition that invites the reader to also question themselves, and to create connections between two things that wouldn’t have been connected in the first place.

Working on *Bereave in Yourself* has been a long and tough process that started off as me completely being in the dark about what I wanted to do. Even in producing a theme, I thought I would not have anything that connected or made sense. In actuality, I kept writing and editing things that strung together as a sort of healing process for me. I have learned a lot about myself as a writer and a person through this senior project and I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to finally complete it. I'm grateful for all my teachers, my peers, and my family who have been with me along the way. I can only hope that the poems in this collection might inspire others to create themselves or come to terms with things that they had been struggling with.

I.

Poetry Reading

I erupt from a baking soda volcano.
There is a full audience leaning forward
in their seats. My parents sit, stagnant.

I am displayed like a middle school
science project, pinned up and painted
on a tri-board. The infographic reads:

“My throat is pulled back
in boy scout knots.
I yearn for feeling again
and again.”

They are looking at me. Listening
to vinegar lava flowing, the red food
coloring staining their clothes.

A standing ovation found crushed in
the backseat of the car. They ask:
Do you ever think about how we feel?

Kaleidoscope Backyard

I sat outside for the first time in a few months.

My mother's in blue jeans and pruning the overgrowth.

My brother's hair is dyed orange and he's swinging a baseball bat.

My sister is sitting on a bench of peeling red paint, lifting weights.

My father is mowing the grass in his white shirt, stuck with sweat to his back.

The wash is hung out to dry and the cicadas are creaking.

There is so much *green* I had forgotten about.

There are flowers too, so many flowers that reach for the sun.

They seem to reach to me too in all of their prismatic color—

only to bring me to my knees.

My father tells me he never sees me.

A ghost in my own home, like I don't live here.

He may be right, maybe I'm not living.

My hands begin to fade as I turn back inside.

Ariel's Grotto, Magic Kingdom, 2005.

Sixteen years deteriorates my fondness.

I buy an Ariel doll at a closing Disney store
for half off. I card my fingers through her soft red hair
remembering my mother holding my hand.

I can't run up to her wet and grinning,
my hands held up above my head.

I can't jump into the waterfalls
flanking the entrance, as it is surrounded
by a pool and a sturdy bridge.

A friend invites me and a few others
to go to Disneyland for a week.

I decline due to hasty planning and fear
of no water between my toes.

I crawl into sand, dig deep in hopes to
cause a flood. But it is only endless dry,
each swipe a spray of grit between my teeth.

What would you give up to live inside a memory?

I can still feel the pour-in-place rubber under my feet.
Hopping from gray to blue

to purple

back to blue

to the tall rock of foam, spotted in starfish.

On the top sits a bronze Ariel, frozen

mid note. My chubby hand points at her.

I look up and then back

toward my mother.

II.

Tugs

As a kid, my brother liked
when my mom played with his hair.
She rested hands in wild black
curls and tugged lightly, and he would lean
back against her hand. Almost like a cat.

Throughout my life, my brother
asked me to buzz the back of his head.
He would sit on the toilet and my hands shook,
angling the razor up toward his crown,
afraid of the aftermath.

I tugged on his curls, or ran my fingertips
up the nape of his neck where I had just buzzed. He
always told me that i could push the razor closer
to his skull, to press a little harder.
that he couldn't feel me.

My mom cut his hair outside in the summer.
his hair laid in clumps on the concrete of our patio
until the wind would blow it away. I buzzed his hair

and it left tiny strands on my hands. I'd have to wash
twice to get it off.

These memories are half moons of hair stuck
on the bathroom tile, outside on the patio. Clung
to my skin. I cannot wash my brother away,
I cannot cut him off, I cannot tug him to look
in another direction. He just keeps growing
back, and I cannot press hard enough for him
to feel my growing apart.

Exhaust Fan

I am sitting in my sister's kitchen,
rewording emails while her husband
attempts to make stir fry behind me.

I take in a tired breath and cigarettes
and beer and something sickly sweet
tears at my sinuses.

I don't say anything.

Maybe it's the smoke from the pan
mixed with the beef and Kevin's
idea to use orange juice. But I am
no longer in my sister's kitchen.

I am back in my own kitchen,
I am pretending to do homework
and it is 10 PM.

I am younger than I am.

My brother is making me food.

I can't remember ramen, or steak, or even stir fry.

There is a fondness that burns the back
of my neck at words he spoke that night.

That everything hurts, that he
wants to disappear just before I
hear the door close.

I ask Kevin if he smells cigarettes.
He tells me no, only a moment later
to agree that what he's making smells
a bit like that. When I inhale again,
the smell is gone.

Autohaemorrhaging

Today I learned that the West Indian wood snake has a defense mechanism that causes it to bleed in response to danger. It expels blood from its mouth and nose. Its eyes flood completely when disturbed. It can live in places like rainforests, swamps, and pine woods. These snakes are secretive and prone to local extinction.

I know that a snake's skeleton is essentially just a skull and a spine. I know they move with strong muscles and that their scales are made out of the same stuff as my fingernails.

Today I learned that my brother drinks 15 beers a day. That he loves me and I don't have to worry about him killing himself because one day his kidneys or his liver will fail. I learned that I shouldn't worry because he said his pain will go away once he does.

I think what I'll do with this information is shed my skin. I will fold it, open my drawers, and tuck it nicely beneath pajamas. My skeleton will bend and crease, becoming serpentine. I will finally grow a twisted spine. I think what I'll do is let myself be picked up and examined by a familiar hand. My brother will look me in the eyes, and they will overflow with blood. I will go to speak but it will taste like money on my tongue. I will release upon him the first plague of Egypt, asking him to let me go.

Assisted Suicide

I cradle the phone against my cheek,
a child listening for the ocean in a shell.

When I was a kid I dreamt of you dying
all the time. That I would be the one

who found you hanging from the ceiling
or the one you would call to say a final

goodbye. Last year, you texted me:

So you're gay— I hold my breath.

Do you know my secret? I breathe in.

Yeah and no what's your secret

You say, *Suicide is always on my mind*

You say, *Don't say anything*

I can't breathe. A day later you
you asked me to choose how you die.

You suggested bleach or maybe jumping
off a bridge. You handed me a gun

and told me, *shoot*. I screamed. You
turned into sand. I cannot hold onto

you— I listen for the ocean through
the dial tone. I say something but

your body keeps washing up on the shore.

My Life Stands, A Loaded Gun

After Emily Dickinson

On top of a tall shelf, tucked away
in my case. Little handgun, sleek
and black, I belong to your father.
I belong to my brother, I belong
to something more than myself.

I am fed and full and never fired.
I am only looked at and longed for,
a threat with such meaning in the
moment that my life becomes a sitting
duck. You and my brother sit in the brush
with mud under your eyes and twigs in
your hair. You both play the hunter so well
when it's your own lives on the line.

My life tries to mimic Dickinson's in her
pent up anger, held tight in her owner's
fist. Face well lit and fired deep into a
doe's flesh, resting calmly in rough hands.

For I have the power to kill, Without —

the power to die— This metaphor becomes something terrifying. This power is not mine. It is the weighted words on a tiny chest, the finger on the trigger turned up.

The sound when I collide with the table is deafening. I am put down while you are put on hold, safety on. I beg to be emptied out, but the lingering of desperation hides beneath a tense brow and a wave of a hand. I put my life back into my case. I will be here to hold when it feels like you can no longer live.

Car Freshener

I'm in an Uber with my friend
on our way home from a night out.
From the moment I enter the car,
I smell cigarette smoke. I don't
remember the driver's voice or
face as they turn around
to ask me if this is my ride.

My head is surrounded in a heavy
heat. All I can hear are gritted teeth
and eye dancing in the glare
the car window. I am thinking
of him. I inhale too fast.

It's milk. Spilled down my brother's chin
and onto the floor. Wet on his cheeks,
a slam of a fist through the door. Parole
officers and beer cans under the bed. Alone
with him. His voice faded out onto the porch
and a phone won't stop ringing. He is dying
over and over and over again. The dial tone

goes straight to voicemail.

A silhouette of him clings to the
back of my heels and wraps arms
around me at the slightest alarm. Afraid
and hungry for the sick in my stomach
and the clench of my chest.

My friend dropped off first.

I stop holding my breath
to say goodnight.

Easter Sunday

I am wearing black
mary janes. Toes curled
into white socks, trailing
my foot up and down
the back of my left calf.
Staring at the zebra finches
in their wooden glass box,
I am enveloped in an
artificial warmth.

The plush carpet,
the printed wallpaper
in gold, orange and brown.
The walls are hung with
smiling faces I do not know.
I wait for someone to take me
inside. The finches turn away
and I count my steps up to
the entrance.

I do not sign the guest book.

Fingers run across chair upholstery,
flowers fill my periphery and I
catch the casket at the end of
the room with it's lifted lid
and varnish glossy under
the dim lightning. I become
still. There is no line of people,
no somber sensation in the air.
I run, unable to breathe
as my hand knocks against the
edge of the casket.
I need to see him. Staring at the
white fabric in its wooden skin.
The body is missing.

A plate is passed to me
to put in the dishwasher.
I am wearing black
combat boots and a white dress
with a slit down my left calf.
Out in the backyard, my brother
plays baseball with his
girlfriend's kids.

I am mourning someone
who is still alive.

III.

If a worm is split into two, it doesn't become two worms

Outside the window, it's raining.

I heard that worms have five hearts.

Back when I was a kid, cutting them in

half or even a third time,

they would keep on living.

The wet pavement became an operating table,

a stick the scalpel. Ribs to knees

we crouched over it.

One of my brothers held a stick to its middle,

and pressed. When it separated, both halves

kept moving.

We squealed in delight.

I remember staying away at a lake cabin.

Midday, I shoved my grubby fingers under

rocks flush against the earth

to find bait for fishing. White grubs,

pill bugs, centipedes, worms

twitched in the sunshine.

Someone told me that worms loved rain.

They come up to feel it fall. I thought

they hated the sun.

My lungs give out.

I learned that when it rains,
worm burrows fill with water.

They can't get enough
oxygen and come to the surface
to breathe. Surviving days at the
bottom of a puddle, I return
them back to the earth.

A safety weight is placed upon
my chest, a flat rock indenting
my breastbone. A child tries to lift it,
tries to split me
in two to see if I live long enough to live.

There is not another half
of me to spare.

Runoff

My ceiling is

dripping into

my mouth

The stain on the plaster spreads into black mold

I am breathing it in I am breathing something in

that is unsettling my stomach It is turning to the sound of the end

of a day,

a week,

a year.

I am tearing at my sawdust carpets I am touching the exposed

outlet in the living room Why couldn't they just fix

the leak that broke me

down to dripping

down back

into my throat—I cannot breathe

this year in softly It heaves in me

and becomes a sigh

A Brawl With Seasonal Amnesia

The bite of winter ashes my knees
and cracks my lips in two.

I strangled it with my scarf.

The grip of spring pins me against
freshly cut grass. I buried it alive.

The left hook of autumn stuns my vision
with reds and yellows and greens. I feel it crunch
beneath my feet.

The stealth of summer stabs me. I faint
from heat stroke before I can remember.

A State of Becoming

My antlers were already bloody
from mid shed in late January.
Velvet draping down in front
of black eyes, I am calm.

Dusk takes over the sky.
The moon lighting moves the grass,
swaying and swishing with my tail.
I step onto harder ground.

Sudden.
Blaring in my ears, dust in my eyes.
Swift pain upon impact, I am
Prostrate through a car windshield.
There is more than velvet in my eyes.

I feel my legs twitching and my spine
misaligned.
My head is a halo of broken glass
pressed into a polyester car seat.
This is where I begin to lose time.

There is a body next to me, the driver.

She is shaking.

She dials 9-1-1.

I begin to decompose within myself.

I rot into my skull, I shed all my skin

until I am completely bone.

Then I began to come too.

My shoulder blades ache as I feel silvery

like the moon lighting.

Like I could dance with the grass.

I wrote this poem right before

I went to sleep. I wonder now who I am.

The deer or the driver, who may be thinking:

What did I do to deserve this?

Ackerson Boulevard

An eager day is pulled
right out from under my covers
by your fingers catching on my skin.

Hooking, digging deeper for doubt
that will fuck me inside out,
stealing my voice before it reaches
the back of my throat.

Your ego is too big
to fit in my mouth.

It's summertime and I've caught
a cold, head full of sick
and a mouthful of lozenges.

I'm walking home with thoughts of you—

Because I need to get the taste
out of my mouth.

all that dazzling sun has put you asunder

Listen closely,
you can hear the sea
as it swallows Icarus.

Feel the wax
hardening over his body,
encased in amber effigy
offered up to the sun
that welcomed him
with open arms
to burn him at both ends
in a spark of simmering gold.

Fold yourself into the waves,
let your body graze against his own:
a bullet of curiosity
aching for his stunning thirst for flight.

Take this with a grain of salt
rubbed deep in your wounds.
Wax dripping idly from your wings

in a pool around your feet
as you reach,
high and wide,
for something they tell you
you can never do.

Still Life With Your Father's Gun

The moon tucked you into the tide
and you dreamed with salt in your wounds

Dreamed of cold shining metal
clumsy and heavy in your hands

As you took it down from
the shelf

As you lifted it from
under the bed

Slowly pulled it out from
the inside pocket of your jacket

Letting it glitter hungrily
as you hand fed it bullets in the moonlight

Your own mouth salivating at the thought
of not waking up from this dream

Smelling of sea salt and gunpowder

you send me a message in a bottle

Glinting green as it glides on the waves

I open it and remember how it made me feel

When you dragged me through the sand

under the weight of your father's gun

Apartment 4-5

Apples rot in the refrigerator fruit drawer
and clipped hangnails burrow in the rug.

Spider corpses line the windowsill next to a
dust encrusted fan and a struggling aloe plant.

I aim to feel safe here. Face to mirror, my hands
grip the poppyseed marble sink.

My socks are left between couch cushions
and water bottles pile on our kitchen counter.

Barbie dolls hold hands and beanie babies
pile for a place on my twin bed.

I need to be surrounded by something.

A jean jacket, a person— it takes me

and I crawl into the washing machine.

Under the pantry closet, into the fruit drawer.

IV.

Rorschach

All that bothers me
is the ink blot
covering my eyes,
whispering a
/guess who/
that curls around
the shell of my ear,
through my head to iron
out the wrinkles
in my brain
until it is a smooth pink sheet
ready to be worn and
put on display.

But right as it is revealed,
the ink spills, blooms
of black biting away
all color, thoughts lost
to a grieving audience
unable to see through
their own landscapes
of identity, too many

faces among the crowd,
too many colors left
to blur.

The Etymology Of /Girl/

There's something about the word
/girl/ being written
on the page.

Curved tail curling under
a *g*, a quickly dotted *i*,
the *r* bleeding so nicely
into a swooped *l*.

It is a short,
swift little term that holds
a whole being in its arms.
Living and breathing and
ballsy and scared,
claiming the heaviness
it has been assigned:
It is human.

Here is /girl/ next to the
pronoun "she".

Tagging along, holding the hand

of /girl/'s looped *l*.

“She” is a shadow of /girl/'s being,

“she” is /girl/'s whole identity

and /girl/ is what

“she” is.

The word /woman/

is an even bigger /girl/,

with it's straight laced

w depicting a more serious /girl/,

a more definite

and scientific /girl/.

“She” is /woman/'s whole being and

existence,

/woman/ is what she is.

They are all attached

to me.

Something between my legs

and growing

on my chest and

in my blood.

I am “she”

and /girl/

and /woman/.

I am “her”.

So I take the heaviness

and the shadow

and pierce it straight

between my eyes,

seeing as only a /girl/

would see.

They are all written next to my name.

They lean close up against my body only to

warp, curled g's and

looped l's,

straight laced w's

buckling, bending out of

shape.

I am having trouble reading

them next to my own name.

Everything so quickly trying to leap back
out from between my eyes.

I try to reason

with the last twenty years of my life,
while the wobbly written word, /gender/
stutters.

A question mark snug

around my neck.

Toothache

My gum line is receding.

My teeth are exposed

at the root, catching

the sides of my mouth.

Did you know that sharks

have the ability to continuously

regrow their teeth? They lose

30,000 over a lifetime.

Maybe I should file mine

down to points. Let them

eat away at my cheeks

instead of enamel.

Shark teeth are not attached

to gums on a root. My skin

is fading. I have not been

to the dentist in two years.

I hold no power over

my exposed bones.

A Girl Is A Canopy Bed

A girl is a canopy bed, drifting
in the middle of a river. Hair
draped fabric cascading into
water, frame aching. I am a
fish trapped in the springs
her underside, thrashing. Rust
metal tears at my scales, my
gills become mesh in the round.
Her mouth slacks open and drools
into my mouth that ohs and puckers
shut.

A girl is a canopy bed that has
been pushed into a river. Occupying
a dead man's float, having lost her
main function. Body that sleeps on
her stomach, face pressed the pillows
of her chest. Water erodes her clawed
feet, forcing me to body awake under
her.

A girl is a canopy bed in a river.

I am a body that was not made

for this girl of gauzy hanging hair

and soft mattress and sturdy frame.

I am a fish hooked into her. She aches

to return to her room. Thrash to keep

alive.

Welcome to Costco Wholesale

My heart sits in a paper souffle cup on a red plastic tray from a Costco sample cart.

It is the last serving and there is no one behind the counter. Feel free to take it.

The walls are white and the floor is gray. There is a concert of machinery hum and a warehouse whirl of the fan. A set of my ears will be in aisle three. Enjoy.

The spin of a rotisserie chicken and raw fish displayed on a bed of ice chips is bound to make anyone hungry. Buy my mouth and you'll get a free cup to fill with a beverage of your choice.

My skin hangs ironed on a clothing hanger with the children's Halloween costumes over by the books. No need to worry about trying it on. One size fits all.

The floral cooler door was left open, bouquets slowly dying from the abrupt sense of heat.

Grab my nose from between bright petals and crinkled cellophane and close the door.

Costco optical should be right when you walk in. Eye exam prices will vary upon location.

With the purchase of one pair of frames, you get a pair of my eyes half off.

You forgot to eat your free sample. Blood is dripping through the cup onto the floor at checkout.

You can't load me onto the conveyor belt fast enough. There is no garbage can in sight.

My heart sits in my chest. I gasp. A woman with a red vest and black pants is asking me to show her my membership card. I left my wallet at home.

Rough Cuts

The door opens with a
jangle of bells tied to
the top of the frame
followed by a grunt of welcome
from a man with a knife
and a white apron.

Behind a counter of mirrored glass,
a body is displayed
in cuts of meat:
slabs of red and pink and bone.

The skin stuck, a price label
on cling film.

Feast on a pan of brisket
from the collar bone
for a tang of silver where a chain
once caressed .

Savor the taste of someone
between the teeth,
in the back of the throat.

There is no longer a man
behind the counter
or a bell tied to
the top of the door frame.

There is only you,
a mirror, and a body
looking back at you
in pieces.

V.

Slice

I think love begins with a knife.

The end sharp against soft bread,
sawing absentmindedly through the round.

It comes in the form of a question,
like a notch between eyebrows or
a lilt at the end of a sentence.

One small glance causes overflow.
A spill of willful words fill
air, paper, and mind.

It's a comforting hum, a waving away
of smoke and the scrape of butter
on toast. It's in the needing, the

kneading of dough and the rising
of a chest that hides in a sigh heavy
with flour and water.

It comes displayed in slices aching
to be held on fingertips, on the tongue

to be swallowed. It's the hint of a smile

and the crumbs swiped under a rug.

The plate is placed down into the sink,
alongside the knife.

Around the Rinds

There is love in the hands that split
a clementine in half and offer it
underneath a table.

Peel off the pith in strips
and separate into pieces.

Gift some to the person on the left,
and press it into their palm.

There is juice on fingertips, wiped on
jeans and sleeves.

Orange woven in fabric, in our hands,
between our teeth.

Like eating the sun in beams,
we hold the light and become
the hands that feed.

Dryad

Their face is polished

Pitch pine wood, slope carved

Down the nose dimpled next to the pink

Petal of their mouth. Knotted dark at the pupils,

Spidering out their lashes. Encircled

By a crown of brown feathered leaves.

We entered this forest thick

With green, Years ago to learn

A language softly. Full of fire

And old age, there is more. If the body

Is damaged, it can resprout and lean

On a neighbor instead of fall.

I am held by the strong

Bough of their arm, flush forward

Against their trunk. My tears leap

Into the black bark of their shirt, cleansing

The earth at our roots. I ask of them,

How much further can I grow into you?

Drive By

I am in the back of my sister's car
with a milk bottle cold between my
thighs. Stevie Nicks is crooning:

You'll know, You'll know, You'll know.

A sweep of nausea is dulled
in seeing a seafoam house tucked into
the notch of a hill and patches of blue
flowers dotting a road verge.

I roll the window down and stick
my hand out, swaying it back and forth
with the wind. I see deer in the dunegrass.
I know this is a moment I will forget.

The Gradual Erosion of Winter

We are stranded on the shore of field two at Robert Moses State Park.

It is too cold to learn to drive on the sunkissed conglomerate that makes up the parking lot.

There is no rush to make sure the beach pass is taped
secret to the inside of the backseat window behind the driver's seat.
No money spent where your windbreaker breaks nothing, the wind
whipping waves into riptides that would swallow you whole.

There is nothing but ticks and deer wandering the dunegrass.

Horseshoe crabs are dead on their backs,
mermaids purses and broken
sunglasses and bits of plastic that you wish
was beach glass glittering in the sun.

This nothing makes you feel warm
despite your fingers turning white.

I roll up my jeans midcalf and grip my
sneakers by the shoelaces.

Socks push snug under the tongue,
as my toes are dipped into the
frost bitten foam. Your shadow follows

me, running away from the water
sprinting up the shoreline.

We play tag with the sea
until the sun goes down.

It's a mass of glowing
yellow yolk drooling
into red and purple
and orange clouds
above us on the
ride home.

We talk back
to the radio
and lift our feet
when we
drive over
the drawbridge
home.

One-Trick Pony

I am holding my pony in my lap.

Thumb on rear, pointer to stomach.

Her tail blooms over my hand.

She is three ounces of hard yellow plastic,
with pink and blue masks printed on her back.

Her wings are sculpted like seashells and her eyes
glint under my shitty, overhead lamp.

Her eyeliner is chipped, but her blush is still rosy.

I twist her teal mane around a black paper straw.

Turning and turning until the end sticks out, pin straight.

I pick a bobby pin from between my teeth to slide
and affix the hair into place.

I repeat this on the other side so it does not come undone.

I wonder about her.

She is not new. She is from 1986.

She is a My Little Pony toy, generation one from
the Twinkle Eyed Ponies line.

I bought her last month after purchasing a few
others for my sister, who has collected them

since she was a child.

Maybe she resents me.

I have taken her from her previous home.

I have tried to curl her mane about four different times.

Manhandled her, aggressively brushed, and ran
her hair under cold water to wash.

She is dotted with bruises.

These brown marks on vinyl can be caused by a reaction to sulfur,
exposure to chlorine, and colonies of fungi.

Fungus is most likely the cause.

This makes her more alive, I think.

Masquerade is 36 years old.

She is great with disguises and isn't afraid to voice her opinion.

I pull on her tail and the curls bounce back up.

Something reflects in her gemstone eye.

I kiss her nose and put her back on my shelf.