

**Into the Taurus Void**

by

Lianna Lazaros

Submitted to the Board of Creative Writing  
School of Humanities  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College  
State University of New York

May, 2022

Sponsor: Monica Ferrell

Second Reader: Catherine Lewis

## Contents

Foreword i

### I

Assembling an Ikea Chair, Alone	1
Throggs Neck	3
Early Twenties	6
What's In a Name	7
I Am Who I Am	9
Having a Coffee With You	10
Why I Stopped Going to Therapy	11
Journal Entry #19: Crossfire	12
My Father Dies in My Dreams for the Fourth Time	13
The Summer Memory That Never Dies	14

### II

Things That Are on My Mind (That I Wish I Could Get Out)	16
--	----

### III

The Last Trip to Coney Island	28
Midnight Catharsis	29
Duplex: While Listening to Radiohead in the Shower, I Dissociate	30
My Grandmother Dies in My Dreams for the Second Time	31
Starting With a Line by Vision	32
A Sestina Where Everything Keeps Coming Back to You	33
Another Sunday on Earth	35
Remembrance, Repentance	36
Inverse Reality	37
Return of the Equinox	38

Notes 39

Acknowledgments 40

A void is a state of nothingness manifested. Nothingness materialized. Schrödinger's void. To avoid everything and consume nothing. To a void and beyond. I have screamed into the void for so long that I became void. I'm inviting you into my void, and I hope that it doesn't leave a void in you.

\*\*\*

*Into the Taurus Void* is a collection of poetry that explores interpersonal relationships and how those impact the speaker's relationship with themselves. While exploring themes of surreal dreams, religion, and identity, the speaker seeks to understand why certain relationships cease to exist.

The literal Taurus Void is an empty region of space between the Perseus-Pisces and Virgo Superclusters. Due to its proximity to Earth, it helps define the edge of the latter supercluster. However, the Taurus Void is not well-studied because it is partially obstructed by the Milky Way.

My interest in astrology began in high school; I was changing too quickly for my liking and turned to astrology to try to understand myself. Because I have six placements in Taurus within my birth chart, I have a Taurus stellium, making me exhibit most of the traits assigned to Taurus. While researching the many aspects of astrology, I stumbled across the Taurus Void and immediately identified with its etymology—I express my vulnerability through my poetry, yet I also choose to keep some things private.

The subject matter of my poems has remained constant over the past four years. I don't like to speak about myself, or my life, for that matter, but I gravitate towards doing so in my writing. It's how I rationalize things; I take my thoughts and lineate them onto paper. Because of this, my first drafts tend to be abstract. For the first two years of workshop classes, this was the critique I've received most often. It was difficult for me to build upon my thoughts with images.

When revising my poems, I think of ways to take readers out of the speaker's head. In the past, I've juxtaposed what the speaker remembers with what they cannot recall. While this technique compels me, it takes away from the grounding elements of poetry, such as imagery and setting. One of my poems, "I Am Who I Am," a poem about the attempts of finding one's self within a suppressive environment, was originally written in the past tense and concluded with the speaker's thoughts. During revision, I changed the poem into the present tense, making it more active and urgent. I thought: how can I give inanimate objects agency within the created narrative? How can I make characters interact to raise the stakes? What image can I end with to emphasize the themes in the poem? Asking myself specific questions during the revision process helps me arrive at a solution. They make me focus on envisioning an alternate version of the poem rather than adding expository details to the narrative I already have in place.

During my second year at Purchase College, I read *Crush* by Richard Siken, who greatly influenced my work. While writing about a failed, harmful romantic relationship, Siken used several techniques that I later emulated in my poetry. I paid attention to his use of enjambment, word choice, and especially images. Over the summer, I read his most recent collection, *War of the Foxes*, and was struck by the images he creates. In one of my favorite poems of his, "The Field of Rooms and Halls," Siken writes, "I put my sadness in a box. The box went soft and wet / and weak at the bottom. I called it Thursday. Today is / Sunday. The town is empty." Here, like in much of his poetry, Siken expands upon an abstract emotion by linking it to an image. He specifies the box even further by attaching adjectives to it and naming it after a day of the week. Then, we're given a time in which the poem takes place: Sunday. The poem's location, the town, gets more specific in the following line through the descriptor, "empty." Siken grounds his concept of sadness with a setting, declarative statements, and metaphor.

My emulation of Siken's work is apparent in my poem "Midnight Catharsis." Following the speaker as they spend a tumultuous final night with their partner, the poem weaves in and out of abstract statements. During a stroll in a neighborhood at midnight, the speaker muses about the distance between themselves and their partner. The lines, "when I reach / for you, I collect more self-pity and pocket it for later," explore the dichotomy of what it means to feel distant from someone, both physically and emotionally. It turns the feeling of self-pity into something tangible. Towards the end, the speaker states, "We call this blossoming—the separation / of the self from what is destroying it." Within one sentence, three abstract ideas are present: metaphor, identity, and destruction. The poem's established setting and relationship between the two characters causes this line to appear less daunting. It makes the subject matter leap from the realistic to the mystical, only for the second stanza, which takes place in a kitchen, to ground the poem back to reality.

When writing poems, I often put pressure on myself to create something spectacular, even with early drafts, which only makes me not want to write. To avoid overwhelming myself with frustrations about writing, I focus on other hobbies, such as playing instruments. After taking music classes for five years, I've developed the skill of learning songs by ear. I listen to the same song on repeat, isolate the instrument of my choice, and play along with the track. Deconstructing a song from its composition to its lyricism is similar to analyzing poetry. Songs stick to (or break apart from) a rhyme scheme, adhere to a form, and abide by a rhythm. I've never enjoyed writing poems that rhyme—it felt forced. When listening to music, I pay attention to how assonance and consonance contribute to the rhythm and rhyme. Analyzing lyricism in a medium other than poetry has helped me learn how to apply it to my writing. It eliminated the pressure to rhyme on the spot and taught me how to attune my ear to sonics naturally.

My poem “Remembrance, Repentance” uses rhyme satirically. It highlights the banality of everyday life while stressing its transcendence. The opening lines of the poem are, “I thought about you in my kitchen / and burned my finger while cooking chicken.” Within the context of reminiscing about an ex-partner, the rhyme scheme gives this moment a comical, mundane veil. The first two lines of the second and final stanza state, “I wish you would ask me about the weather / or why I still haven’t returned your sweater.” In both instances, each rhyme scheme gets broken by succeeding lines. The speaker desires to camouflage their grief through whimsical-sounding language. But, no matter how hard they try, it never works. The concluding lines of the poem state, “...the left sleeve’s lipstick stain washed out / when I last wore it in the rain—I’ve ruined it.” Although an inter-line rhyme is present, it never gets the opportunity to flourish as the new rhyme scheme comes to a halt with the poem.

During periods of writer's block, I listen to music that touches upon subjects I find writing about to be difficult. I like to think of these songs as my translators, my muses. To go along with my collection, I’ve curated a playlist that echoes the themes in my poems. Composing the playlist has helped me determine the ordering of my collection. I paid attention to how titles, recurring themes, and images juxtapose and are in conversation with one another. Oppositely to the structure of my collection, the playlist is divided into different parts. Side A represents how the speaker of my poetry feels about themselves. Side B mirrors the five stages of grief in the context of mourning a failed relationship. Side C illustrates the relationship the speaker has with their parents. Side D, which only consists of one song, captures the collection as a whole. It remarks upon several interpersonal relationships and circles back to the self towards the end. The song repetitively asks a question that never receives an answer. Lyrically, it ends in a moment of exhaustion: “I can’t think because I’m just way too tired.”

\*\*\*

To feel nothing after feeling everything at once is to feel void. I filled my void with writing, only for writing to open another void. The void expands and shrinks within me, always. How to avoid the void: you can't. I'm not sure what to make of this collection yet—ask me what I think in five years. I may want to throw it into some void, or perhaps it will disappear into the void on its own.

*Into the Taurus Void* — Accompaniment Playlist

Side A:

The Ballad of Me And My Brain — The 1975

Leave It In My Dreams — The Voidz

Sincerity Is Scary — The 1975

Ask Me Anything — The Strokes

this is me trying — Taylor Swift

To Be So Lonely — Harry Styles

Side B:

There She Goes — The La's

In Transit — Albert Hammond Jr.

Razorblade — The Strokes

Everyday I Love You Less and Less — Kaiser Chiefs

I Couldn't Be More In Love — The 1975

The Tulips on the Table — Dan Reeder

cellophane — FKA twigs

Under Control — The Strokes

Side C:

You Are Your Mother's Child — Conor Oberst

Kyoto (Spotify Singles Version) — Phoebe Bridgers

Landslide — Fleetwood Mac

Side D:

Is This It — The Strokes



# Into the Taurus Void

Lianna Lazaros

*You are not as tired of the poem  
As I am of the memory*

Jericho Brown



## Assembling an Ikea Chair, Alone

Even the crows are  
laughing at me. They think I'm  
pathetic, sitting

on the floor, crying  
about how the leg won't twist  
in its socket and

how I ruin things  
with my hands, like my mother's  
favorite vase or

the cactus on my  
window pane that I forgot  
to water. Those were

mistakes. I make a  
lot of those and refuse to  
apologize for

most of them. I'm good  
at nailing my thumb with a  
hammer and I'm bad

at asking people  
for help. My head isn't screwed  
on right. The chair splin-

ters my palm: a prick  
in the middle of the floor.  
My mother knocks on

the door and asks if  
I had something to eat. No.  
I forgot. It's past

dinnertime, she says.  
Oh. I haven't noticed. Too

busy trying to

build the mess I made.

## Throggs Neck

is a Metrocard discarded in a puddle  
of rain and motor oil next to a gutter  
on Westchester Square, where a bus  
driver will see a teenager run after  
the moving vehicle and refuse to stop.

Where pigeons make nests in the dents  
of rusted, discolored subway stations.

Where the 6 makes me late to almost  
everything and never apologizes.

Twice I've cried on that line, and people  
just stared. Passengers, please direct your  
attention to the demolition on your right:  
the only movie theater in town is gone!

Doesn't that make you want to cry, too?  
Tremont Avenue is a gravity well—a mouse  
trap smothered in glue—where there are  
three pizza shops on the same street  
and then one will close because it doesn't pay  
its workers minimum wage or the health  
department will say it isn't clean enough  
and none of this matters if the cycle keeps  
repeating. I'm tired of broken traffic lights  
and drag racing at midnight and potholes stripping  
the roads. I'm tired of the streets getting  
closed for weeks for construction.

Nothing is here for me anymore—  
I'm not sure if anything ever was.

Throggs Neck, I wish you would stop  
hurting my feelings. I'm sorry the city  
spells your name wrong on exit signs

to save money, but I wish you wouldn't  
take it to heart when I say I never wanted  
to be here in the first place.

Look: the neighborhood's stray cat  
dropped another dead baby bird  
on our doorstep. As a gift. As a sacrifice.  
Fifty pigeons line the telephone wires  
and shed their feathers on our front lawn—  
I promise that isn't an exaggeration.

My town made city-wide news two times:  
once when men shaved their heads  
to commit voter fraud, and the second  
when The Pigeon Man said he won't stop  
feeding birds because it's his obligation.  
His life's purpose. I've watched his brick house  
cave into itself and now I watch his flock  
grow. I'll be the one to say it: he's lonely.

People resurrect into animals at their most  
solitary state. Throggs Neck, I'm fine  
with you making me hate myself, but please  
don't make me start hating the birds.

In 2009, I handprinted wet cement  
in our driveway and the etching still hasn't  
weathered away. I look at them and I see my past  
and future at once, which means I see nothing.

The 42 takes me to Saint Raymond's cemetery  
and in the distance I see Trump's golf course,  
where he had to steal land from the dead  
to claim another thing to his name.

One day you'll bury my handprints,  
Throggs Neck, but I hope you will run

out of room to bury my body.



## Early Twenties

On social media, Nicole  
from high school gets engaged.  
Kaitlyn gets married, and before  
I can congratulate her, she gets  
divorced. Carlo tries to seek

out God for the third time  
and he actually succeeds.  
That's enough internet for today.  
Or maybe for ever. I haven't  
uploaded a status in two months.

Sebastian asks if I'm doing okay—  
I feel like I'm in a forest of brain fog  
where leaves sink from the trees:  
send Tweet. Then delete it in two  
hours so no one gets concerned.

I still don't know how to fold fitted  
sheets. My sanity is in the hands  
of a steaming/cold cup. I can't sleep  
before midnight. I've stopped eating cereal  
and I've started drinking black coffee

and I don't know why—things change.  
I have to accept it. Like the nights  
when I feel too big for my twin-sized  
bed and shrink myself into a speck  
of dust that the vacuum forgot to suction.

## What's In a Name

Another Creation Story: a body didn't  
ask to be born. The faces waits to fade

into history. The body knows what  
it is going to be called before the face

does. The body is named Lazaros—  
His first name isn't important.

Lazaros was a young boy when he  
thought the world was unfairly cruel

to him—his parents died before he reached  
twenty, he moved from one family home

to another—so Lazaros thought it would  
be fun to take drugs and run along subway

tracks to paint graffiti on old cars.  
Lazaros almost got arrested. Lazaros

almost died, then decided that he didn't  
want to die, so he married a woman who

also didn't have a first name and whose  
last name metamorphosed into Lazaros

because who she was before marriage  
wasn't important. What's important is that

they had a child. Five years later, they had  
another. When the first child was twelve,

Lazaros had a stroke while fixing the tire  
of his car and almost died—again. He

layed near the curb of the sidewalk  
and the sun rays made his skin glisten.

For a man who didn't want to die, he looked peaceful in an almost-death. Maybe he wasn't

scared anymore. But he didn't have time to find out, because when he woke up

in a hospital bed under blue, fluorescent lights, the doctor told Lazaros that he

recovered in a way that appeared to be miraculous. Lazaros was grateful for a third

chance at life. Until the years went on, and Oldest-Child Lazaros heard

Lazaros say that he wants to go to sleep and never wake up. To relive his accident

and not get saved. O, bless the tragic man whose punishment in life is to keep living.

## I Am Who I Am

It happens in the stairwell across from the chapel after school hours. The nuns retire to their neighboring convent, but their presence lingers like the holy spirit on a Sunday morning—invisible, yet you believe it is there. The nuns are gone, but I still see them in each cross hung above every classroom's chalkboard.

I ask her if she's ready, as if she is the one who needs reassurance. She cups my cheeks like she is receiving communion and looks at me; this is our sanctimony. The nuns will never know, like they will never know about the ritual of passing notes in class that said, *meet me in the bathroom*—initiating the anointing of our lips together.

Clusters of dust surround us in the stairwell; a cockroach scurries past. Custodian keys clatter from the floor above: a warning. Breaking apart, my hand tangles in her curly hair as though I am gripping a rosary with its cross poised in my palm, rupturing through my skin. Each week when the sacrament completes, the stigmata strengthens.

## Having a Coffee With You

is even better than hearing a song for the first time.  
In a crowded Starbucks, your voice rises over  
the murmur of people chatting about a test they forgot

to study for or a party that's next weekend, but why  
care about that when you're sitting across from me,  
looking like you do in your blue denim jacket that

your curled hair drapes over. I order a medium iced cup  
with two shots of espresso even though I should know  
better by now since it makes my pulse race, but not

as much as you do when we're in each other's space—  
our legs bump under the table and I apologize even though  
I did it on purpose, just to see your face redden. You leave

the seat to get your order that I didn't let you pay for  
and you puncture the lid with a straw. Please don't do  
the same thing with my heart. Instead, tell me about how

your day has been. I did this, and I did that, and now  
I'm here with you. And that's enough. In the warm,  
golden hour, this almost could-be-love could be enough.

## Why I Stopped Going To Therapy

### I.

My old therapist is nameless;  
her office remains like a diorama—  
pale green walls, a bleached-brown  
couch with a coffee stain on the left  
cushion, wilting purple flowers  
in a vase, a half-used box of Kleenex,  
the windows, curtained, eliminating  
any sun rays from straying onto my face.

### II.

I answer the questions she asks me,  
hesitantly: No, I don't think about  
hurting myself. Yes, I have trouble  
falling asleep. No, I would not like  
to talk about my childhood anymore.  
These are the things I catalog to not  
speak to other people about. At the end  
of the session she asks:

*is there anything else  
you'd like me to know?*

### III.

My leg bounces in time with  
the click of her pen. I tell her  
the thing I was too afraid to tell  
my mother, the thing I repented  
in church. When I confess, she  
looks at me with a tilted head  
and raised eyebrows—a growing,  
condescending smile,  
like she just witnessed someone  
plead guilty to committing a crime.

Journal Entry #19: Crossfire

At dinner, my mother tells  
me I'm just like my father  
after I talk back to her  
by accident. I break  
eye-contact and stare into  
a silver spoon—a distorted  
face deadpans back  
with flared nostrils  
and white knuckles—

I want to tell her  
if I was like him, I would  
forget to floss my teeth  
every day. I would drive  
close to cars that cut  
me off so our license plates  
almost touch and I almost  
rear-end them in the middle lane.  
I would tell someone I love them  
as a lie. I would have voted  
for Trump. I would place expectations  
on my child and abandon them  
when they need me most. If I wanted  
to be him, I would have to hate  
myself more than I already do.

Her knife scratches against the plate  
cutting through overdone steak—  
an impatient foot makes the table shake.

My father clears his throat. I wait  
for him to apologize.  
Instead, he scrapes his potatoes;  
gulps down a beer.

## My Father Dies in My Dreams for the Fourth Time

Splayed on the sofa, my father wears nothing but a pair of black shorts and a white undershirt. He's crying. Says he's in pain. From what, I don't know. But I believe him. Sweat trickles down from his forehead onto sideburns. The moonlight makes strands of gray hair shine. *I started getting them after you turned thirteen*, he jokes. It isn't funny anymore.

He tries to sit up, but his stumpy legs stick to leather cushions. No point in trying. No point in wasting any effort. He chokes out, *pills. Get pills.* Which ones, I ask. *Any. Doesn't matter. Whatever it takes to make it stop.* So I get them. The whole white bottle of them, and hold out two in my hand: an offering. The lamp flickers beside us. He chokes down the pills with a groan. With a sob.

*More*, he says. I pour two more. *More.* For once, I don't feel like arguing with my father. A handful of pills. *No water*, he insists. Says he needs help. I'm not sure I understand. He takes my arm in his hand and pulls it up to his mouth. How a deadly action can feel so warm coming from him. The pills funnel from my palm down to his throat. He gurgles. I coax his back. Swallows.



## The Summer Memory That Never Dies

You sit with me under the weeping willow tree listening to the Pixies. The sun begins to wane, but that's not our problem, we've decided. We have all night to map the stars hiding in the cold sky & the freckles on your thighs. An eyelash strays onto your cheek—stop to make a wish.

Stop making wishes. July's arid air lingers with mesquite & hickory & chlorine, & despite the five mosquito bites on my thigh, there is no other field I would want to sit in. With a pocket knife, you crack a pomegranate open. Its juices river down your fingers, creating stains of red veins.

Mars trails after the setting sun. I run my fingers up cracks in tree bark. You look up at me lazily, mumbling a promise to take me to the Roche. Asteroids compass our memories in the above galaxy, making them combust, wade, & fade. Blades of grass leave imprints on my shin. You're sitting right next to me. I miss you already.



Things That Are on My Mind  
(That I Wish I Could Get Out)

I am thinking about what to write. I am thinking about how my life is content for my writing, and I am thinking about how there is something unethical about that.

I am thinking about how many times I've cried while reliving the memory of a traumatic event just to write a poem about it. I am thinking about how that is an act of cruelty against myself.

I am thinking about the people I memorialize in my poetry even though I have not spoken to them in months. I am thinking about whether or not they would appreciate how they will live forever through my art.

I am thinking about how I would like to think about nothing.

I am thinking about death.

I am thinking about death some more.

I am thinking about how I am never not thinking about death.

I am thinking about how I keep hugging my mother like it will be the last time I see her. I am thinking about how I've never seen my mother get sick, really sick, so sick that she had to be in the hospital sick, and I am thinking about when that day might come.

I am thinking about when my mother fell down the basement stairs nearly ten years ago, and I laughed, and everyone yelled at me for laughing, and I am thinking about how if that happened now, I wouldn't be laughing.

I am thinking about how I listen to my grandmother, now eighty years old, walk up the basement stairs, and I am thinking about how I hold my breath to listen for a loud thump in case she falls. I am thinking about how her pace has gotten slower, and I am thinking about how much longer she will keep joining us for dinner upstairs before we have to start eating at the downstairs dining table.

I am thinking about how I am watching my grandmother die, and I can't remember what it was like to watch her live.

Or maybe that's not true. I am thinking about how I was doing the laundry downstairs, and I overheard my grandmother sing "Crying" by Roy Orbison while she was cooking in her kitchen. I am thinking about how, over the twenty years that I've lived with my grandmother, that was the first time I heard her sing in private. I am thinking about how I folded the clothes extra neatly that day just to memorize her voice, and I am thinking about how I'm already starting to forget how she sounded.

I am thinking about how it is pathetic that I am beginning to cry as I write this, and I am thinking about how I should probably stop to calm down. I am thinking about how that isn't important right now.

I am thinking about how every time I drive somewhere, I carefully select which music plays on the radio in case I happen to die in a car crash, and I am thinking about which song would be worth it to hear for one final time. I am thinking about how the answer to that (hopefully) hypothetical scenario is "Someday" by The Strokes. I am thinking about how that answer might change in a few weeks.

I am thinking about how my neighbor's family member died in his sleep on their couch, and I am thinking about how I would prefer to die that way than in a car crash.

I am thinking about the car accident I got into while driving on the Hutchinson River Parkway, and how I could have died from that, but somehow I am still alive.

I am thinking about how my parents drive together sometimes, and I am thinking about how I think about what I would do if they were to die in a car crash. I am thinking about how I wouldn't know what to do, and I am thinking about how I don't like to think about that, but I still do, anyway.

I am thinking about how my father left late from work once, and I asked my mother if he hadn't come home yet because he could have gotten into a car accident. I am thinking about how my mother scolded me for mentioning the possibility, and I am thinking about how I learned to not speak my anxious thoughts.

I am thinking about how I turned silencing my thoughts into writing down my thoughts, and I am thinking about how writing them down is worse because, still, it's an act of vocalizing what I'm thinking.

I am thinking about whether I have changed over the past couple of years.

I am thinking about the time I asked a friend if he thinks I have changed throughout the time he has known me, and I am thinking about how he said I am becoming less of myself.

I am thinking about if I have ever been full of my self.

I am thinking about how I should stop asking people for their perceptions of me.

I am thinking about how I need to stop measuring my self-worth through other people's perceptions of me and my past growth.

I am thinking about how much longer I will have to think for.

I am thinking about how the brain keeps working for seven minutes after the heart stops, and I am thinking about how, even after I die, I will still be thinking.

I am thinking about how I am going to think myself to death.

I am thinking about how I never thought I'd live to be twenty-one, and I am thinking about what to do now.

I am thinking about when I will get my first gray hair.

I am thinking about the scar under my left eyebrow. I am thinking about how, at thirteen, I took a few extra-strength Tylenol—which is to say, more than the

prescribed amount. I am thinking about how I fell asleep after taking the pills, and I am thinking about how I woke up and fainted, hitting my head on the corner of my bedroom's light switch.

I am thinking about how a few pills weren't enough to kill me, but they were enough to make me realize that I don't want to die.

I am thinking about how I would probably like to die before I am seventy. I am thinking about whether climate change will allow me to turn forty. I am thinking about what it would be like to watch the world unfurl against itself and die from that.

I am thinking about how I would like to think about something else now.

I am thinking about how everything I think about leads to death.

I am thinking about Uncle Bill, who died when I was eight, and I am thinking about how I cried in the stairwell at school the day after his funeral.

I am thinking about how the only part of his funeral I remember was when my mother dragged me by the hand to kneel in front of his casket. I am thinking about how she told me to pretend like he was sleeping—even with bifocals balanced on the bridge of his crooked nose, with his neck wound up in a striped tie, and with a silver watch on his right wrist, inches above the spot where my mother grasped like she was trying to search for a pulse.

I am thinking about how my mother told me to pretend like he was sleeping, but I thought that he looked dead.

I am thinking about how, ever since his funeral, I haven't been able to stand in front of another open casket: not Uncle John's, not Aunt Janette's, not Aunt Sarah's and Uncle Don's, not Aunt Mina's, not Uncle Johnny's. I am thinking about how, for half of those, I couldn't step into the chapel without feeling lightheaded.

I am thinking about how that probably made me look inconsiderate. Sorry.

I am thinking about how I have been avoiding grief my whole life, and yet, I've managed to immerse myself in it.

I am thinking about how I am crying for the second time while writing this, and I am thinking about how I should probably, definitely stop writing. I am thinking about how I will continue.

I am thinking about how I have to stop one thought abruptly to write down a new one. I am thinking about how quickly my brain produces thoughts, and I am thinking about how I would like it to slow down.

I am thinking about how my sister makes fun of the sound my keyboard makes when I type fast.

I am thinking about how I love my sister, even when she annoys me, which is more than half of the time.

I am thinking about how I would not like to live in a world where my sister dies before me. I am thinking about how my sister would react if I died before her.

I am thinking about whether my sister and I will still be close in five years.

I am thinking about how I am crying for a second time within five minutes. I am thinking about how I will still continue to write.

I am thinking about why I want to write.

I am thinking about how I don't have an answer to that.

I am thinking about how I don't have an answer to a lot of things, and I am thinking about how that upsets me. I am thinking about why I want to have an answer to a lot of things, and I am thinking about how I don't even have an answer for that.

I am thinking about the dream I had last night, where my professor told me that she didn't like my poetry anymore, so she kicked me out of the creative writing program.

I am thinking about how I cannot control what my subconscious thinks about when I am sleeping, and I am thinking about how much I hate that.

I am thinking about how Julian Casablancas said that he has died in his sleep twenty-three different ways.

I am thinking about how I keep dying in my dreams: falling off of a building's ledge (or maybe I jumped), getting run over by a train, two gunshot wounds to the chest—me, screaming for help as my neighbors stared from their porches—a man dressed in black stabbing me on the side of the highway, in the backseat of a speeding car with no one behind the wheel.

I am thinking about how I always wake up right before I die. I am thinking about how, even in my dreams, I can't imagine what it's like to experience death.

I am thinking about how, yesterday, I had a dream about Emily Dickinson's poem, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" I am thinking about how a shadow-figure recited the poem to me, and I am thinking about how I jumped awake after hearing the second line: "Are you—Nobody—too?"

I am thinking about how, yes, I am Nobody—I am also Somebody. I am thinking about how I would just like to be a Body without a Brain.

I am thinking about how if this piece were to have a soundtrack, it would be "The Ballad Of Me And My Brain" by The 1975.

I am thinking about how you will eventually have to stop reading my thoughts, but I will still have to think about them. I am thinking about how lucky you are.

I am thinking about how unlucky you are because I am forcing you to read my thoughts. I am thinking about how sorry I am for that.

I am thinking about whether or not I am trauma-dumping. I am thinking about how I may be overstepping boundaries with you. I am thinking about whether this is worth sharing anymore.



I am thinking about how this is creative nonfiction. I am thinking about how I am using form and repetition to control the delivery of my thoughts. I am thinking about how I am being selective with what information I choose to share.

I am thinking about how the reason why I like to write is because of how I can control my thoughts on paper.

I am thinking about how I am still under the illusion of control. I am thinking about how I cannot think about how to free myself from the illusion of control.

I am thinking about how self-conscious I feel now, sharing my thoughts through my writing for you to read. I am thinking about how you will judge me.

I am thinking about how earlier I said I am going to think less about people's perceptions of me. I am thinking about how that only lasted for four pages.

I am thinking about how I can pause my thoughts whenever I can.

...

I am thinking about how I had to force myself to stop thinking, and even then, I was thinking about how I should stop thinking.

I am thinking about why I cannot force myself to stop thinking before I go to sleep at night. I am thinking about how I should take melatonin again, but I am also thinking about how at the highest dosage, it doesn't help me.

I am thinking about how the wrinkles and dark circles under my eyes are becoming more defined, and I am thinking about if I am the only person who is aware of this. I am thinking about how, if you're reading this and are aware of it, please do not bring it to my attention.

I am thinking about the time I pulled my first all-nighter at eleven years old. I am thinking about how the sunrise ruptured through my blinds, and I am thinking about how pale everything looked in the morning light.

I am thinking about when staying up late stopped being fun and exhilarating. I am thinking about how I don't have a precise memory to pinpoint that feeling.

I am thinking about how I would die for the ability to go to sleep by eleven o'clock at night daily.

I am thinking about how I could die tomorrow.

I am thinking about how I could die the next second, and I am thinking about every second that passes that makes me stay alive.

I am thinking about Queen's song, "Keep Yourself Alive."

I am thinking about how I forget to think about how I am alive.

I am thinking about how I feel alive with Justin. I am thinking about how Justin forced me to go on a roller coaster that turned us upside down with him at Rye Playland, and I am thinking about how I thought I would die from going on it. I am thinking about how I screamed and screamed as it made us feel weightless in the sky, and I am thinking about how the adrenaline made me feel alive.

I am thinking about how I am going to be friends with Justin until the day I die. I am thinking about how that is not something I can say about most people.

I am thinking about how I feel alive when I use my body to create music.

I am thinking about the first drum set I owned at four years old, and I am thinking about how I don't remember playing it, but I remember loving it. I am thinking about my cousin Megan, a drummer herself, who bought the kit for me.

I am thinking about how I feel alive when I use my body to create music, even when it results in bleeding cuticles from plucking and strumming steel guitar strings.

I am thinking about how, if I can enjoy playing the guitar when it makes my fingers bleed, then I can enjoy writing even when it makes me cry. I am thinking about how to find joy in writing again.

I am thinking about how this applies to my life, too. I am thinking about how grief is part of the human experience, and I am thinking about how I am reducing myself to the world's painful attributes by submerging myself in it.

I am thinking about how, when I look at my mother and wonder how many days I have left with her, I am wasting her present company. I am thinking about how much time I have been wasting, and I am thinking about how much of that time I will never get back.

I am thinking about how my mother covers her gray hairs with hair dye, and I am thinking about how she disguises the passage of time. I am thinking about what it will be like to watch my mother grow old. I am thinking about how I'm already doing that, but maybe I don't want to admit it.

I am thinking about how, at my sister's sixteenth birthday party, she told me she needed to have our grandmother there because she doesn't know how many birthdays she has left to spend with her.

I am thinking about how, maybe I'm not the only person that thinks about things like that—the unpredictable timeline of our time on Earth. I am not sure if I should think if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

I am thinking about the amount of times I've put off scheduling things in advance, like traveling to Boston to stay with a friend, because I thought that in my absence, someone would die.

I am thinking about how, when my father was in the hospital, I took his cellphone to communicate with my mother while I was in school. I am thinking about how a part of me kept waiting for a text that said, "he's getting worse. The doctor said he may not make it. We don't know what's going to happen," but the texts never came.

I am thinking about how I'm stuck in that waiting period. I am thinking about how I always have the ringer of my phone on in case something bad does happen.

I am thinking about how upset I am that I have lost time because I keep thinking about death.

I am thinking about Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I could not stop for Death."

I am thinking about how I would like death to kindly stop for me, too.

I am thinking about how death does not stop for anyone.

I am thinking about how joy shouldn't stop for anyone, either. I am thinking about how the world does not work like that.

I am thinking about how I need to stop demonizing the world.

I am thinking about how the world has brought me things that I could not live without.

I am thinking about my friends, my family, the artists I love, and I am thinking about how lucky I am that I get to exist at the same time that they do.

I am thinking about how the human experience means to live until you die.

I am thinking about how Tennessee Williams wrote, "time is short and it doesn't return again. It is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, Loss, Loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition."

I am thinking about how I'm ready for that, Tennessee Williams! I am thinking about how I'm ready for that now.

I am thinking about how, for the rest of my life, things will happen that I cannot control. So be it. I am thinking about how I don't want to define my life through loss, through gaps that I've tried to jump over.

I am thinking about the lifespan of a moonflower, which takes at most six months to grow. I am thinking about how it blooms at night, and I am thinking about how it dies in the morning's sunrise.

I am thinking about how the human experience is like that. I am thinking about how I still care for the people in my life even though I know their presence will not be permanent.

I am thinking about how to lead with love is a choice, and I am thinking about how it is a choice I am willing to make. I am thinking about how love is powerful enough to get me through this grief.

I am thinking about how the middle part of our lives, the stuff that happens after we're born and before we die, is the part that matters most. I am thinking about how to feel alive means to be alive.

I am thinking about what it means to live.



## The Last Trip to Coney Island

It's low tide at sunrise; the crescent moon

hangs in the sky. Even the clouds want us  
to go home. My shoelaces latch

onto loose nails in the boardwalk. I reach  
towards you for balance—the steadiness

never comes; I am a buoy in the ocean  
floating against the current, whirlpooling into riptides.

*This was a mistake*, I think, even though  
I don't know what I'm referring to.

You're four steps away from me;  
I can still smell the sunscreen in your hair

& taste the salt in the air. Beside you, the lamp post  
flickers; the banister splinters

my hand. You talk about boats & the ocean,  
how even when your feet are planted on land,

you still don't feel grounded. White-knuckled,  
you lean over the railing & stare at seagulls

pecking at a dead fish; a boy chases his sister  
with a short stick. Below us, waves ripple

& melt on the shore. A sign that says *no diving*  
*from pier* means that someone went & did it before.

## Midnight Catharsis

A crow flutters out of the streetlight's glow  
as none of us knows its silhouette from the blanketed sky.  
We're a block away from your house  
and your hands tell me you don't love me anymore.  
When I reach for you, I collect  
more self-pity and pocket it for later. You look at me  
over your shoulder and disappear  
through the door. I walk away slouched and sluggish.

The last thing your fingers touched  
was the red thread tied around my thumb. It won't unbraided  
itself, so the thumb begins to plump.  
And pulse. And clench nerves to their death. A scissor's blade:  
too thick to cut beneath ridges of skin.  
The kitchen cleaver: a saint. The time is 12:34. The time  
is now. Palm against cutting board,  
blade at the ready: *thwack!* Clean cut against bone.  
I can't stop the sputtering of crimson  
onto white walls; We call this blossoming—the separation  
of the self from what is destroying it.



Duplex: While Listening to Radiohead in the Shower, I Dissociate

*“What was that you tried to say?”*  
*— Everything In Its Right Place*

Suds roll off the shoulders & circle the feet.  
Keep the head tilted down. There are hands.

There are hands that don't know they are hands  
& there are lungs that forget to breathe.

Breathe in: a droplet goes up the nose—  
eyes water. The back of the throat burns.

The left forearm's burn begins to burn  
& bubble—breathe out: the skin pinks

into a shade that matches the rosy toes.  
They're trying to speak, trying to tell me

that the brain melted out of the body.  
That they need more suds to drown in.

Hands, get the soap. The soap slips from  
stiff fingers and clatters next to the feet.

## My Grandmother Dies in My Dreams for the Second Time

In the dream that I don't realize is a dream until I wake up, my mother calls me on the phone. She's downstairs, she says, and needs me to stay in my room. Which is also what I did when my father fell in the kitchen once. This is how I know something is wrong. All I hear from the phone is

my mother crying. Sometimes I forget she does that. Most of the time when she does that, it's because of my grandmother. And now it's because she no longer has a mother. Her voice shrinks to a muffle. I press my ear to the floor, hoping to hear a sign of struggle. Coming from either of them.

The last breath. The last prayer. To intrude upon the last words of my grandmother. Instead I hear my mother pumping air back into my grandmother's body. A private christening. It continues for minutes, longer than it should have. How much can you resuscitate someone who has been waiting to die. Enough.

At least, this time, it doesn't happen in my arms.

Starting with a Line by Vision

What is grief if not love persevering.

If not the preserving of flower petals  
pressed between pages of books. Or

writing someone's name in the sand  
with a twig—or your finger, or a shell

shard—right before the tide rolls in.

Or stacking weathered pebbles

on top of a gravestone in the rain.

Knowing in the heart—to continue  
to love, despite its impermanence.

## A Sestina Where Everything Keeps Coming Back to You

In the parking lot, my car's exhaust  
filters through the window pane.  
The radio plays static jargon—  
a song about telling sweet little lies.  
On my left side, a spider webs  
its net in a patch of dandelions.

The engine stalls. I think about the pressed dandelion  
you gave me for my birthday. It is exhausting  
to remember you. I thin into strings of web  
abandoned by a dead spider on a window pane  
that you killed days ago. Upturned, it lies  
in a plastic cup, caged from your romantic jargon.

The letter I almost sent you is full of jargon  
& metaphors as weightless as a bloomed dandelion.  
I said that I shredded it & that was a lie—  
it's shoved in a nook on my bookshelf. My fingers exhaust  
with a sigh when I stumble upon it, producing painful  
papercuts. I'm trying to free myself from the waxy web

you spun. The only thing holding us together is the webbing  
of you & I in lines. Outside of all this flowery jargon,  
we don't intersect. It begins to rain. Drops drip down the pane  
& I watch two paths connect. The dandelions  
droop; the ground muddies. The lot fills with exhaust  
& melancholy. I have nothing better to do than lie

in the driver's seat and text my mother, lying  
about where I am. I'll be home soon if I can web  
myself out of my own destruction. I'm exhausted  
from not telling the truth, but sometimes jargon  
is the only thing that can protect me. Dandelions  
tell me to float on. The rain echoes on the sunroof pane.

The sound isn't enough to forget how painful  
it is to measure the tides of your absence Another lie:  
you're gone for good. I can't look at dandelion

weeds without thinking of you, even ugly things, like a web  
doused in morning dew. Sorry if this is repetitive jargon—  
I don't know what else to do to purge my exhaustion.

I pluck a dandelion & laugh at its pain-  
filled howl. The spider's web evaporates. Carbon exhaust  
pollinates my lies. They fruit into jargon.

## Another Sunday on Earth

where I try to love a Sunday.  
The sun stays behind the clouds  
and comes out an hour before  
it sets. I haven't left my room  
all day, but I've managed to get  
out of bed. This has to count  
for something. I'm trying  
to make it count for something.

## Remembrance, Repentance

I thought about you in my kitchen  
and burned my finger while cooking chicken.  
How many marks will you leave on my body  
before you realize they will heal. Two years  
ago: a fingernailed-crescent carved into the back  
of my hand. If I stare hard enough, it resurfaces.

I wish you would ask me about the weather  
or why I still haven't returned your sweater;  
it's hanging stoic in the back of my closet  
and the left sleeve's lipstick stain washed  
out when I last wore it in the rain—I've ruined it.

## Inverse Reality

Tonight I cried about the death  
of my future. I looked at myself

in the mirror and saw my past  
selves. I cried some more. I kept

looking at myself—all bloodshot  
and blue-eyed with chapped lips.

The skin cornering my mouth  
started to crack. My face turned

into putty, except I couldn't mold  
it back into its regular state, if that

even exists in the first place. The past  
fills inside me like sand in an hourglass.

I keep flipping myself upside  
down to restart the cycle. To funnel

a different outcome—to look  
at myself in the mirror and not be afraid

of who looks back.



## Return of the Equinox

It's spring & I remember  
nothing. The leaves  
of cherry trees pinken;  
A dead raccoon lies roadside.  
I wake up with a lemon rind  
in my throat & go to sleep  
with pulp in my teeth.  
You ask me about love &  
I tell you about loneliness—  
about the dents in my bed  
my feet sweep over, about  
framed photos of friends  
I don't speak to anymore,  
about the window left ajar  
just to hear neighbors argue.  
The kitchen faucet leaks  
twice a week. I strum my  
untuned guitar. Birds chirp  
at three in the morning.  
I'm not sure why I'm telling  
you this—I haven't spoken  
in two days. Every night I cut  
off one inch of my hair.  
Yesterday, I dreamt I spit  
a fish out of my mouth. I'm  
trying to make sense of this.  
I'm trying to understand why  
I can still hear my thoughts  
during a downpour at dawn.

## Notes

“What’s In a Name” borrows its title from *Romeo & Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

“Having a Coffee With You” is written after “Having a Coke With You” by Frank O’Hara.

“The Summer Memory That Never Dies” borrows its title and adapts lyrics from “Instant Crush” by Daft Punk feat. Julian Casablancas.

“Duplex: While Listening to Radiohead in the Shower, I Dissociate” is written after Jericho Brown.

“Starting With a Line by Vision” is written after “Starting With a Line by Joyce Byers” by Eric Tran. The first line is borrowed from Season One Episode Eight of *WandaVision*.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Professor Ferrell, Professor Hoffman, Professor Lewis, and Professor Okasi. Thank you all for seeing something in me that I never knew was there, and thank you for helping me nurture my craft. I am so, so grateful for everything you all taught me.

Thank you to the editors of *Gandy Dancer* and *Submissions Magazine*, where some of these poems first appeared, at times in earlier versions.

Thank you to my parents, who always support me in everything I do.

Thank you to my friends. Thank you for reading earlier drafts of these poems at ungodly hours. For always inspiring me. For keeping me grounded. Your friendship makes me feel like the luckiest person alive.

Thank you to the sun and moon.

Thank you to music.