

Soft Things With Bones

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Dear Reader,

Starting at a young age, I began regularly fainting. Wherever I went, from the train, to the doctor's office, to a Mexican restaurant, I always suddenly found myself lying on the floor. I was frequently losing control of my own body and no one understood why. These were, I came to find, panic attacks in tandem with vasovagal syncope, but for a very young child, the sensations I was feeling were terrifying. I often believed that my lungs would stop working. I would lay awake at night imagining each breath; focusing on the effort it took for my lungs to move. I didn't understand the heavy feeling in my chest. I didn't have the vocabulary to quantify or justify these experiences the way I do now.

Once it was determined that I didn't have a heart issue, that was that. There was no follow up. While I eventually learned to control the fainting on my own for the most part, as time passed, several other health enigmas began to present themselves. For a period of a few months as a tween I completely lost my ability to swallow solid food and was resigned to having juices and smoothies as my only form of sustenance. My throat felt closed. I started imagining that other openings in my body would seal shut too. I was obsessed with the thought that if I closed my eyes I may not be able to open them again. I didn't trust my body to carry out basic bodily functions. Again, this issue eventually faded without serious medical intervention. As a whole, these various health conundrums were chalked up to me having anxiety.

As an older teen I was diagnosed with several endocrine system disorders and was on and off various medications. It was thought for a time that I may need to get a tumor removed from my pituitary gland. Though the tumor would have been benign, the prospect of having surgery on a part of my brain was not a pleasant thought. I began dealing with chronic fatigue and hair loss. Watching my once very thick curly hair grow increasingly thinner and more fragile was very

disorienting. Hair is the one part of a person's body that they have near complete control over, and I felt that I was losing that control along with my hair and my sense of identity. The fatigue was, and remains, debilitating. I struggle to accept the fact that I am unable to get my body to work the way I want it to. I don't have the energy to be the person I want to be. This sense of loss of bodily control, something which has been a persistent factor in my life, has made a huge impact on the writing within this project.

Much of my earliest written work in this collection focuses on organic matter and the flora and fauna of forests and ponds. A huge influence of this nature-based writing was the poetry collection *American Primitive* by Mary Oliver. I was deeply inspired by the way in which Oliver was able to reveal facets of the human condition through discussing the natural habitat and animal inhabitants of the woods. I've thought a lot about soil and fungi, small creatures and ancient trees. Focusing on these things in my writing which I consider as bigger than myself, allows me to grapple with difficult and complex emotions and relate them in a way that feels reflective of their importance. It would feel reductive to talk about being "sad", instead I talk about being mud, or a spoiled fruit. I find comfort in transforming my physical being into new things through poetry, objects which better embody feelings of pain or numbness.

In addition to mental turmoil, many poems in this collection explore a sense of physical distress. Several poems focus heavily on bodily transformation and in particular the grotesque. Reclaiming control over my physical form, even through metaphorical means, is profoundly therapeutic. In the poem "Maman", this theme of bodily metamorphosis is on full display. The speaker appears as a monstrous spider and describes their changing form, "I became strong / My marble eggs / Bronze body. Steel cage / I sprouted silky eyes / And dreamt of limbs / My silver spit. My life milk / Feasts and fetuses / Milk moth belly. So swollen / I molted / My

wooly womb. My woven uterus”. Through this poem and others in the collection, I’ve attempted to occupy body horror in a way that feels empowering. The body as a whole takes on a character of sorts in this project. Many poems fixate on swallowing. Many are preoccupied with specific body parts: throats, breasts, ribs, fingers, etc., and their different textures, consistencies and functions. The poems explore swallowing as in eating, but also in the sense of learning to accept things. Several pieces in the collection deal in large part with swallowing difficult truths.

My present health conditions may eventually result in struggles with infertility, which is something that informs my thoughts on motherhood throughout several poems. Motherhood as a theme in this project therefore is intrinsically linked with the body. In order to contend with my complicated feelings on motherhood, I’ve conjured up metaphors of tadpoles and bird mothers, giant spiders and baby geese. I’ve attempted to explore the relationship between body horror and the physical transformation the body undergoes in pregnancy. This idea largely comes from Marianne Moore’s animal poems, in particular “The Paper Nautilus” in which Moore details the physical violence of childbirth and the sacrifice of using one’s body as a vessel. Using animals to encapsulate these themes allows the poems in this collection to carry what I feel is a greater depth and a greater distance from me as the writer. Ironically, hiding behind personified objects often allows me to speak more truthfully to my own experiences.

The poems in this collection that were written later take on new forms beyond natural environments. In several poems I consider my familial ties, drawing from the hyper-stimulating bubblegum interiors of my early 2000s childhood as well as reimaginings of my parents’ respective upbringings: the grungy, hazy cityscapes of 1970s New York and the delicate hues of suburbia. In a poem called “Yesterday We Found Her Hair...”, I construct a fictional story from my father’s childhood and lean into more personal aspects of my own identity, for

example by incorporating Yiddish words, “I kept thinking about Queens / Blvd and holding Her manicured hand / As we schlep to the beauty salon where / The ladies all smile at me and call me / Bubbeleh. I hide beneath Her woolen / Coat. Tug on Her rain bonnet so I can / Babble in Her ear.” In another poem, “Barbie Jeep Vehicular Manslaughter”, I use specific tangible objects to capture the sickly-sweet essence of my childhood, “My life used to be pink and gemstones / And huge eyes and talking horses and / Anatomically incorrect turtles and girls / Who are all legs and chalk nubs and / Crushing on mermaids with purple hair”. Through these poems, I examine the way in which we process things differently as children as compared to adults. In taking on the persona of my father as a young boy for example, I try to hone in on the things that a person that age may be noticing and what they may not be understanding. Nostalgia or a yearning for childhood is a theme that opens the collection and closes it. It's easy to envision one's childhood as happy and carefree or better than the current situation when that may not have actually been the reality. We will always crave things that we can no longer have and times that no longer exist.

In writing for this project it was important to me to pay attention to texture and touch when it came to my choices in language. Not only do I choose words to be sensory descriptors, I want the sounds the words make to contribute towards an overall tactility that listeners can almost feel. This again has much to do with the themes of the corporeal present throughout the project. This type of attention to texture and usage of alliteration and other poetic sound devices is most obvious in a poem called, “I'll cut off my hands and regrow them for you...”. In the poem lines such as, “In Woods Hole / Wordless wormless / It smelt like Coast of Maine / Hot pink potting soil” and “So androgynous and gorgeous / Do you still love my / Atrium ovaries and ocean things/ After the Cape”, exemplify a balance between word meaning and word resonance. After reading Seamus Heaney's poetry

collection North, in which Heaney specifically chooses to use dense, earthy, monosyllabic language, I became very interested in finding words that fit the “vibe” of a poem based off of their sound as opposed to just an accurate meaning. In particular, in a poem called “Archangel Gabriel Announces God's Will”, I paid close attention to the language I chose. I focused on using guttural, earthy sounding words with lots of “b”s “d”s “m”s and “gr” sounds. I wanted a throughline in this collection to be the visceral way the words make the reader feel.

Surrealism has come to play a huge part in my work. Considering the subject matter of many of the poems, I felt that incorporating absurdist imagery would prevent certain concepts from becoming overly melodramatic. The poetry collection that introduced me to ideas of surrealism within poetry was *The Oblivion Ha-ha* by James Tate. Over the span of working on this project, I have become more comfortable writing things that don't contain a specific discernible storyline or narrative. Many of the poems in this collection strive to evoke particular feelings or sensations within the reader based on a sense of the language used and not upon content. Writing without the restriction of “making sense” was strangely liberating and allowed me to produce, I feel, some of this collection's most interesting works. The surreal also plays into the disorientation of having a body that doesn't function the way you want it to. Strange and dream-like images best evoke the complex sensations of life and consciousness. Our brains are unreliable and inventive. Many poems in this collection revolve around dreaming, another tie in toward the theme of nostalgic remembering.

When you're reading through this project, it's important to not dwell too much on what the poems are actually about. I've attempted to produce a collection with little narrative structure. The point is the nonsensical and the unreal. In many cases, I am writing for myself, in order to process things and with little regard for the intended reader. If these poems make you feel something, that's great! But in

many cases, I was writing to have fun with it, to entertain myself, or because I physically needed to let the poem leave my body. I want the reader to place whatever meaning on the pieces they desire. This project is about feeling things, good and bad and feeling them vividly. Thank you so much for taking the time to read.

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Barbie Jeep Vehicular Manslaughter

I was a baby in a living room once
My life used to be pink and gemstones
And huge eyes and talking horses and
Anatomically incorrect turtles and girls
Who are all legs and chalk nubs and
Crushing on mermaids with purple hair
When did I stop being in love with the
World and all of my babysitters when
Did I become a manipulative toddler
Thumbsucking fucker forgetting how
To swallow my life was as sweet as pepto
Hippo milk pesto poop and past due
My life was goldfish and cream cheese
Cucumber sandwiches my life was
Crustless and crestfallen strawberry milk
Bubble bathes and a giraffe on my birthday
I'm an 8 year old with a heart monitor at
Chuck E. Cheese and they can't figure out
Why I'm on the floor again they can't figure
Out when I went bad when I turned rotten

Friend is Not a Bunny

Drank

the dark

liquid

loveliness

of words

Something

else soft

with bones

Another

cat to hold

An object

too fossilized

to swallow

Animalistic

urge to bite

A body

still warm

A woman

stuck in

men's skin

Perfume bottle

with legs

Lace trimmed

lawn or

heavy snow

Fabric of dawn

black pond

rapture

Deep and

hollow

A dreaming den

A throatless

swallow
Stuck between
fullness
and wholeness
I could never
wrestle with
an angel

Archangel Gabriel Announces God's Will

I figured if I felt it in my bones,
I could spell it out in mud.
When you became a man,
you dreamed of bowel movement and blood
red meat. My body, birthmarked and naked.
Manly things on the mind:
Grow a beard. Go bald. Bind breasts.
When you're a man you can grunt
into a neck. Bend a back. Soften a spine.
A fatty mound, a rib, an ass to be mounted.
I moved your hand but you decided to grind me
into stone fragments. In the dark,
buds are moist but never bleeding.
When you're a man, what you desire
you touch. I drank moon-broth
to become less shrunken. Your fingers
remade into nubbed icicles
Or something that cannot feel.
This was a skull buried for decades
Unearthed so I can tell you
To swallow my excrement and fossils.

Among My Swan

What if I cracked my skull open
and let the soil spill out
What if I stopped being a person
crying about little potatoes
that I bought at the farmer's market
You wouldn't care either way.
I tore my throat apart
telling myself
You'll eat me.
And yet, my swan
I still love you.
I see fake ones
out in the wine lake
And my mud skin
is porous
and waiting for you
to crawl in it.
How many months
where you looking
at men while I looked into
your egg yolk eyes
and at sinking buildings
And imagined.
A plush marsh pillow
weeping willow
What were you imagining?
A cock in your mouth probably.
And I'll scream
And I'll scream
And I'll scream
And I'll blow the house down
You'll tell me it was all

my fault. My flock of swans
are mine. You'll banish me
from our bog land
that nobody should ever
build houses on. *I wish we hadn't*
I wish I was dead
most days
But then I hear the geese calling to me
And I lay in my bed
And I vibrate even though
I'm not cold
And I was a baby once
And the geese are mine alone.

Mud

I have never lived
I know no one
I know nothing
Except wet and
Feet and fingers
I love no one
I am no one
I don't know tender
Sometimes
I know warm and
I know soft
But never long
Enough to grow
My own tongue
I know no one
I am no one
I am so mud
I am so still
I am so breathless
I am so bodiless
I don't need to be loved
I can just be
I can just stay
Glacial mud
Ancient mud
Soup mud
So nothing
So mud

From the Hole

If I nestle beneath roots
shroud myself with grasses
and bits of shrub
I may sleep
I may mimic a mouse
But my belly of seeds and grains
misses your warmth again—
A memory of burrowing
into your chest
Nibbling on bone-milk and berries
A dirt musk
A certain mole
The birthmark on your shoulder—
Now I barely remember the shape.
I'm feeling beastly
My love is bulbous and waxy
But I'm waiting for the melt
I'm ready for the birds
to consume me—
This reminds me
of the stones I gather
for the mound I speak to
because I can't
speak to a body anymore
It's for the best
I would've tried to eat her
Everything in my love-nest leaves me
to chirp and squeak and scream
Because there's a snake near my hole
and I need comforting
Still I've never grieved this much
because you have a mouth

and I have a mouth
and mine is full of mulch
It won't stop bleeding—
I need more soft things
Merlot and meat
A fleshy piece
A tender groin
I'd gnaw on any marrow
But this underbrush is not thick enough
The brambles aren't yet heavy with fruit
This water feels a lot like a womb
To sleep like Ophelia
rotting in a creek
may be for the best—

I Swallowed it Whole

I slept hard
I dreamt up
A lavender tub
Instead there's
This bloated bath
And their pterodactyl
Is eating shit again
And I wrote a poem
On this skinned sofa
On this mauve-ish morning
I dreamed of teeth
And an apple slipped
Out of my opening
And I named it Fred
I dreamed of north
And coastal and
So many ocean maps
And an indigo sea slug
Slid out of my stomach
I'd forgotten I'd eaten that
I wanted something nautical
A scenic byway and
A home with an aqua-colored toilet
But then I dreamt up
A plastic cage
With pastel poop
Pterodactyls
With talc bones
And chalky teeth
I slept soft
I dreamt of powder
I dreamt of lavender

The roof might cave in
But it's so light
That it won't hurt when it buries me.

Prophetic Dreams of Bleeding Out in Snow

The snow died when I was twelve.
The angels went with it.
And now it's all...
Get a job! Get out of my house! Etc. Etc.
Lately, I've been remembering this
Glacier with magical powers
And mysterious healing properties
The hidden tradition of a dead planet
That glows white and hurts to swallow
You know the one...
The one that existed when you were
Tremendously young and not afraid
Of the cold or the scabbed faces
When did you start bleeding?
Why are you afraid of bleeding?
Where has the blood gone?

I'll Cut Off My Hands and Regrow Them for You

In Yarmouth

Your mouth so yellow yarrow

I grew lobster hands

Perennially

In Woods Hole

Wordless wormless

It smelt like Coast of Maine

Hot pink potting soil

There's a double bed

My body balsamic balsam

I was belligerent or benign

A bowl of milk with a baby in it

Lassoed a buoy

Around your neck

Boiled my claws

Buried my head

In the sand

Saliva so syllabic

It smelt of salvia

Not lavender

In a sea-salted space

Self-soothing

Regaining strength

Slowly becoming sun-loving

A coreopsis bloom
Crossing bridges and estuaries
Craving bread and a breast
Coagulation of the blood

I wanted to know
How hard you can get
Throbbing like a horse's neck
Lightning-struck redwood

So leather dyke
Cowboy Seaman
How soft can you get
So tight tender pussy willow

So androgynous and gorgeous
Do you still love my
Atrium ovaries and ocean things
After the Cape?

I Was a Tadpole Once

She hissed at me
Before I had limbs
I never knew a warm belly
Only mud
Bird mother tongue
cannot clean my wounds
cannot distinguish my
throatless screams
from bubbles
and vomit and feathers and muck
She never held me
She never had hands

But you—
I loved you before I had eyes
You held me
While I was shapeless
While I was goo
Sickly sentiment
I'll rest on a lily pad carpet
and wait for my lungs to bloom

I need someone to watch
over me
Come inside me
Penetrate
my pores
Soften my skin

You—
Oxygen-rich, delicious
I'll drown if I'm not with you

I need you to stop me
from growing too hard

I can remember how
The pond made her shriek
Made her beak sharp

So what about my little ones?
Will they breathe?
Will they swim?
I'm scared I'll ruin them—
I need to grow my fingers first

Maman

I ate so many children
I became huge
So loving and mothering.
My thorax. My throat
And twisted limbs
When Louise forged my arms
I became strong
My marble eggs
Bronze body. Steel cage
I sprouted silky eyes
And dreamt of limbs
My silver spit. My life milk
Feasts and fetuses
Milk moth belly. So swollen
I molted
My wooly womb. My woven uterus
They crawled inside
I bent like milk. I came like milk.
I swallowed so many...
I became so huge. I became so delicate
I crept beside the skyscrapers
And loomed over steel and insects
Long legs
Like my dainty mother
My monstrous mother
Containing eggs
And so many...
I had a bald spot
And a body
And 10,000 babies
And 10,000,000 arms
And orbs for eyes

With so many little cysts
Specks of pinkish crust
Raging in my ovaries
Waiting for the welt and wailing
Mother, I made you something

Umbilical

I've prepared these horse bones for my broth
Nutrient-dense mud. Variegated leaves. Varicose veins
Wormy purple Wandering Jew. Lamb's Ear bloom
My perennial nest. My rusty tusks. Earthy cloth.
Give me something mossy. I'm nurturing sick oranges
Nursing a baby clementine. She has a unibrow
And hooded eyes. A toy potato masher and a pet moth
I can't recognize myself. Sickening skin crawl
My chest is deflated. Teeth marks on my nipples
Plum-pudding or mud-puddling. The butterflies need to eat
I wanted to let this boil a little longer. The kitchen
Begins to stink.

Yesterday We Found Her Hair...

But I kept thinking about Queens
Blvd and holding Her manicured
Hand her cigarette like a 6th finger
As we schlep to the beauty salon where
The ladies all smile at me and call me
Bubbeleh. I hide beneath Her woolen
Coat. Tug on Her rain bonnet so I can
Babble in Her ear. She will hum back
Something soft. I'll go to my corner sit
On the floor and read my Mighty Mouse
Book then count the diamonds and the
Squares on the patterned linoleum.
Watch a man reach his hand down his
Pants in the park across the street.
The park is purple when She whispers
My name again. She reminds me that
My father is generous as She pulls out
The money He gave Her to pay the
Smiling lady at the counter and Her
Hair will be so coily and heart-shaped
But She won't let me touch it. Then I'll
Hold Her hand as we walk back across
Corona Ave. Tightly as we walk past the
Loud men outside the building. Stare at Her
Shiny new hair as we crawl up the stairs
To the apartment with the marigold wallpaper.
Her hair nearly melts from the heat and
She sighs and we stew and I settle into
Sleep. That night they murmur about the
Power being out in the whole city. In the
Hallway She and the other mothers play
Mahjong by candlelight... But yesterday

I imagined a soft skeleton still wearing its hair.

Long Island Lady

Teethy and long. Blind and scaly.
Beaded throat. Bearded dragon.
Drawing on an eyebrow and
Drinking too much wine. I do it too.
Soon your body will seep through the
Bed and into the floor like a sap.
It will turn a dark caramel color.
Until then, let's keep the cats fed.
Act fast, real-estate is running out!
Choose your stone and etching soon.
Remove your teeth.
Swallow something quickly.
Quickly, eat something!
Fill up your stomach
So that they can't
Stuff it with rocks.

My Enemy is a Submarine Sandwich

10,000 pounds of sludge from
New York and New Jersey
So Italian and meaty and greasy and
Peppered with dandruff
I swallowed it all and
Woke up covered in mold
I dreamt of the grainy taste of clay
And harvesting bodies for jam
A bloated corpse floating in the East River
In my dreams she was plum
I stabbed her 82 times
Swallowed what was left
The nastiest white trash I'd ever tasted
She sat in my stomach
Seared a hole through my small intestine
Now I'm using her bones for utensils
I'm sewing her scalp into a quilt
I'm repurposing words and body parts
Maybe she'll write a poem about it
I dreamt of a dried red
A stain that stunk but was forgotten
A sunken feeling in my chest
Like a creature had been nesting there
My twins Hoboken and Hackensack
Purred and purred and
Now I think I'm ready to release her

I Was a 16th Century Nun

Jesus and
Mary and
Snail baby
Sitter, bitter, butter
Cream and girdle
Turtle hearts on
Fertile clouds
A watchful
Lamb's third eye
Spies holy
Angelic hierarchy
Like being so poor
That I can't afford a studio in
Wholly wooly celestial hell
Drinking milk
In the silky sinning grass
A brassy singing throat
Alive anointing
Olive oil
On raisin girl
My plush pink neck butterfly
Engorged enlightened
With fire and kisses
Wishes away flaming
Fishes withers away
Florals and bread
And mouths
Head
From a girl with huge
Heavenly fig-like features
Divine preachers
Divine creatures

Divine Messenger Robert Moses Said:

Unravel the red sea. Build me a glorious freeway. Cross stitch another bridge. Forge me a sparkling landfill. Eight lanes of shimmering concrete. Can you transfigure this shoreline into a more equitable shape? Can you redesign this overpass so that only cars can crawl under? Embellish this street with spikes and studs. Erect something ugly. Banish the thugs and the unrighteous. Too many rabbits are running to the suburbs. The rabbis are studying something cardinal. If we raise another high-rise shrine He will be pleased. The bloodless bodies under this building are beginning to stink. Lamb-like things. There's too much green. The people might find someplace to sleep. Give them some cheese and a room with a pee pot and a mousehole. Turn this park into a parking lot. I can see now that this is very good!

jam & barbed wire

as big as
bullets or beads of sweat like
chainmail & cobwebs they cover they spread across body parts & drywall

dream of eyes
enormous when wet like holes in
flesh & sepsis or septic or gangrene & gnawing at the marrow

gnarled wooden hair
handgun cocked a 9 year old
instructed how to shoot her mother standing proudly at the sidelines like

jesus saves &
killers kind of have to sometimes
lacerate the faces of mothers expecting children & kill their husbands &

make some toast
nervous systems & organs flutes octagonal
open wounds waterlogged soaking through chests & clothes smelling metallic & putrid

pockets of earth
questions & combat knives hidden in
reach for butter knives & oatmeal & canned beans & spam &

squashes every day
til the days turn to weeks
unwavering eternal circular melt like ripples or engines or breathing or bodies

vegetables & corpses
who once wanted to become grandmothers
x-rated movies a glock & pork rinds for their last day alive

yesterday was simple

zip ties & too many wrists

all they ever got was jam & barbed wire & cold &

The sea is love

It's a glowing mouth
For feeding glass
And eating things out of
Lavender lobster
Silver squid
Jello mold
Something kosher?
Radiation pleasure pool
Burbles up a caramel-colored
Clorox bottle. Cool!
The sea is love
Like gossamer and windchimes
Thistle and mauve
It was giving you it's heart
And hearty soups
This shoreline is made of
Meat and grease
A headless limbless corpse
And a promise
To put top soil on top of
Discarded crockery
...Then maybe plant some trees

The Trees

The trees are having a meeting

The trees are thinking

The trees are talking politics

The trees feel pain

The trees make friends

The trees hold hands

The trees eat Papa John's

The trees use paper straws

The trees are chatty

The trees play board games

The trees use furniture

The trees keep warm by the fireplace

The trees make babies

The tree can't make rent

The trees do taxes

The trees have decided to go paperless

The trees die of old age

Sea Cow Heaven

Estuaries and amethyst
Kelpy, slippery daydreams
He was doing swimmingly until
The boat came through and
Grazed his belly. His scarred back,
Dragged away to the marina
So they can make the most of
His bones. Donate them to a science museum
Or something. Earlier, I was petting one of
The babies. Focusing on its mossy stomach
and gentle snout. Imagining how huge it was
Underneath me. If there's a sea cow heaven,
I just know it's beautiful.

A Home

The gigantic moth on the moon
The gaping mouth of the maple
Swallowed by a hollowed tree
Sage and breathing knowing and
Scarred bark and snarl gnarled
Arms and elbows. Something
Gross is happening. Nestled in
Stigmata wounds. A fig inside a
Flesh tomb. A fresh womb. Grasped
A moose's velvet antlers. I need
A coniferous forest home. Some
Wood and some broth. Something
To boil. Garlic bulbs. Potato eyes
The trees speak with such strength
If people hate me I will still live

Goat Cheese and Winter Sound

I want fig and honeycomb
Rosemary and pink moons
I've been nesting
Built something out of
Tinsel and string
Cranberry necklace
Unfolded a bird
Gave it a name
Something
Love
Two swans
facing each other
Flushed bodies
Of bleeding-hearts
Intestinal and motherly
Something delicate
A chicken-hearted girl boy
Red, but not like violence
Like having your babies
The tomatoes are kissing

I Am Afraid of the Mole Rats

Dragonflies by the creek
with crystalline eyes,
white opal wings
sometimes torn,
always hovering
just out of reach
over my head
and not easily seen
until they are dead.
I am afraid of the mole rats.
Rubbing wild onion
between
my two fingers
to mute the scent of
stagnant water, sulfur stench
because of algae
that blocks the creek's
arteries, where deer carcass
slept, a feast for fungi
an appetizer
for eldress snapping turtle
and then,
great blue heron
steps on it's spine.

Open Up Your Skull

The young girl— she was light
and breakable, like an insect. Body an artist's mold.
He had to dig a hole fit for a chest.
So he could squash
the bug. A trail littered with blood and leaves.
Her screams make the dog bark.

Her hands torn from birch bark.
He continues his work by faint light—
heaving, grunting, slurring. It leaves
him tired and spent. He creates a mold
of her skull in his mind. It's firm. A ripened squash.
He will keep her in his chest,

Close to his heart. A hidden chest,
buried under sheets of white bark.
But her face had become a misshapen squash.
Her skin purple and light,
bread covered in mold.
Under the birch trees, her throat full of leaves.

It pains him that this is how he leaves
her. He thinks about her deflated chest,
her lungs of black mold.
When he comes to visit her the dog will bark.
He studies her face, light
extinguished. Stomach gutted like a squash.

She will forgive him. For his thoughts— he had to squash
Down fall his tears. Down fall the leaves.
Her bones are light.
He digs his hands into her chest,

his skin like bark.

He will never be able to mold

Her memories. The lichen on the trees is mold.

By bystander birch trees, a rotting squash

sleeps there. Under white bark,

and lifeless leaves.

A buried chest.

And then it begins to become light

again.

Lessons

I was teaching the sea slug in my living room how to speak.
Bubbling purple and turquoise. Some words are simple but hard
to say. Sentences are even slipperier. I was speaking through a river mouth.
Swallowing something muddy. *Oh how I love the taste of dirt and pennies!*
I was teaching the sea slug how to write a love letter. I was teaching it how to
Morph into the most perfect shade of blue. How to be a be a productive member
Of society. How to get a real job. How to grow a mollusk skull. How to keep the fleshy
Bits hidden. How to make everyone like you. I pretend to know these things. Inside me,
Drifting sea hearts. *Soil And Much Much More!* I am an advertisement for how not to be
A good daughter. A wart on my nose. A pearl clenched tight. A salty one-lunged life.

I Am a Terrible Person

And my mother is a wafer

Is a spoon feed.

And my father is marrow

And kernel and salt.

In this scene

The bear has a diet soda

And the cabin is burning.

I'm struggling to remember

what page I'm on.

In this scene

He's telling me that a

Master's degree is obsolete.

The bear is as real

As I want him to be.

Mary, tell me how to live my life!

I was thinking of *American Primitive*

And berries and fish.

Tell me which salt to use.

So soft inky fur and groaning.

So warm and wooden, perfumed

So tasty bubbling beverage!

So crisp cold taste!

Savory splendor!

Garlicky goodness!

Happiness!

My Casserole is Generous and Worthy

I

I am in the morning of my life and I am
a fountain of blood in the shape of a
girl-woman. Half goat/half bird. My
chest would look better carved out. I
can not find my throat. My fingers are
enormous. I can not find a girl's hands.
Wet beaked, half-baked and hairy in
all the wrong places. I will unspeak.

II

A stew full of unpronounceables and my throat
is woven shut. This poem is like a womb-soup.
A woman broth. Wishy-washy and fishy when
you don't want it to be. At seventeen I was
well-rounded and womanly. I could water this
all down to be digestible. But I won't. What
if this was so thick it had trouble going down?

III

Nothing I say needs to make sense but everything must be
in the past tense. I kissed the belly button tree. I slept hard.
I ate a half goat/half bird burger. I was thirteen when a man
asked for my number. A man once told me that I was hot-
headed. Hearty, hefty, whatever. I chopped up some meat.
I craved and I woke and I wept and I ate and I swallowed.

IV

My casserole is gangrenous and wordy. Mouthy wormy. I only make food
that's big-breasted and baby-brained. Bleeding from all the wrong openings.
This stinks, it doesn't shrink. It smells like asparagus or candied yams. Made
with piss and love and baby fat. I found words again. Toothless and winged.

V

I can make art out of pain but I can't make anything out of numbness. My eyes are closed.
They sealed shut in the shower. My asshole is closed. It sealed shut while I was sleeping.
If I were smaller I would be fuller. I will not be afraid to take up the whole page next time.

This Car Climbed Mt. Washington

So I am asking to be cut open octagonal
-ly. I have a lungworm or a mucus chest or
A heart-shaped key. There's a hole there
Where a stone should be. But I'm not dead
Yet. I'm not born yet. I'm tired and I'm growing
A kidney or a bean. Returning to dust or
Loving too much or rusting premature
-ly. I'm so old. And just so hungry writer. My
Lover owns a plant nursery and I teach my babies
The Latin names for trees. I'm scared of things
That die. Or things that age. So I am asking
For a bees nest. I want to eat. Crystallized
Honey. Like eating sand or swallowing rocks.
Someone offered up a chunk of concrete. I'm a
Quarter born. And I'm too close. And I'm too
Far. There's no more real estate. My father
Will sleep elsewhere under some gentile rock
Holding hands. And I'll sleep in a box.

Opening the Windows to Hear Sounds of People

I've found myself under mildewy old cartoon comforters
In a strange dream where I'm eight years old again and
Everything is shades of green or purple and the dog is
Fat but I don't know what that word means yet. There
Are duplicates of my mother but all of them are safe.
There is a baby sleeping next to me and it's holding
My finger. I've been trying to match it's breathing for
Some time now. My stomach is full of stuffing and
Bird and little potatoes and casserole and things
I used to hate. There's a man outside the door
And I'm trying to figure out whether his foot
Sounds are angry or content. I'm dreaming
Again and I'm trying to find a videotape at
The store where it smells like dust and
Glow. I'm blueish and waifish and
Waiting under fluorescent light for
My mom to purchase a black box
For the night. I'm dreaming again
And I'm so small that I haven't
Yet wanted to die. I can eat
Plastic all day. Plastic bell
Pepper. Plastic fork.
Plastic fuck... That
Isn't meant to be
There because
I don't know
That word
Yet.
...
In this dre-
am I'm count-
ing the light-

Ed door-

Bells. I'm chim-

Ing. I'm a chim-

Ney. Or a steep-

Le. Or a smoke-

Stack.

But now I'm too little to know.

I'm learning to wiggle my

Fingers and toes.

This dream is cove-

Red in heav-

Y snow.

Capitalizing the Thing in My Head

Maybe I was really dreaming of a gas station bathroom
A heart-shaped hole in the wall
Unpleasant yet charming
Like getting a pap smear
Or the sticky floor of
A dive-bar. A half-here
Bare-breasted bone broth.
Grain silos and manure.
Something intestinal like
Can you hear the snow?
Where did the snow go?
Like dead poultry on ice
Portions are expensive
Portland is expressive
Porcelain is aggressive
And on and on...