

Visit to the Yakult Factory, 1995

Our names both began with 'A', so we had
to hold hands. You said the same bacteria
in our shit was found in Yakult. The way
you said '*shit*' made me giddy with laughter.
You squeezed my wrist, so we would not
be shushed. We shuttled down factory lines,

women in hairnets and masks, eyes bright with
automation. Under the microscope, tiny rods
wriggled then bloomed in blues and purples.
Later we ditched straws, slipped foil tops off
and slung the liquid down. I imagined
our intestines lighting up with neon gardens

bouquets of cells watered by milky elixir
beginning an interminable dance, spinning into
trillions. On the bus back, your sweaty palms
melted into my sticky fingers. I could only think of
our bacteria swirling and dividing, yours becoming
mine. I had to lick my hand to make it my own again.

Museum of Aborted Romance

Here is a place we may abandon
artefacts from Loves that never
finished gestation. Their cords cut
before they grew full-bodied enough
to wrestle with our half-made minds.

Here is a collection of not-quite tragedies.
A fridge of hearts with stumps for wings
frozen in a state of readying. Beyond
the danger sign, a closet of chimeras
spliced from best parts of old lovers.

In the basement, file away projections of
tenderness in his gaze, frisson from her
accidental graze of flesh. A seismograph charts
early tremors with tiny arcs. Nothing erupts.
Teetering tapes of late-night conversations

unspool from too many rewinds. Cabinets sigh
with sheaves of overanalyses. Through the haze,
a shrine of cards and gifts selected for ambiguous
intent. On calendars, circled in lipstick red,
dates forever inchoate. Overhead, a map lights up

all the stars we must have crossed. In a box,
locked, tools of romance's abortion: reason's

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trump card, insidious tripwires into friendship,
catatonia from a broken heart, cold showers
the morning after, vulnerability's proud ramparts.

By the exit, you will find
a bin of battered mobile phones
aglow with his final text,
her hanging line...
Leave yours behind.

The Cubist

could never remember
the shape of my face.
He clasped my chin in his palms
and read my cheekbones
with his fingers. He did this every day.
Thumbs tracing borders,
a cartographer
carving.

At night, he colonised them.
I splintered
into conquered fragments, each stiller
than life. My neck extended/snapped,

a broken accordion. Eyes
crumpled into
the hollows of a gorgon's mask.
My nose funnelled out—an exotic
fruit. Darkness etched woodgrain
on skin.

Elbows and knees
creased fans of origami.

He never looked me in the eye.

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Instead he fixed on parts:
the arch of my foot,
the bow of my lip.

I was crystalline. My body
a jagged hall of mirrors.
endlessly refracting his lonely gaze
—all this unwanted light.

The Writer

After your relentless foreshadowing,
I held on for the end. Batted repartee,
fed you my wit. Endured your
clumsy atmospheric: walks in parks,
hands almost brushing, an old couple
in a rowboat mirrored our blushing.

I sat through the tedium of family history,
plodding political commentary. Smiled
indulgently as sentences ran on,
tripping with clauses. Still I kissed you
at dawn, in a climactic scene when you
left on your inevitable journey of self

discovery. I watched smug from
the margins, as new characters
waltzed in. Convinced of my place
as the enduring motif, your golden
narrative centrepiece. The novel
could never end, without you reeling

me back for more romance. Your
omniscient hand did not deign to
fill me in about the new sparkling
heroine. You wore my expectations
to rags, then lost the plot. Left me

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holding the gun that was never shot.

Fact is you fucked me over.

To employ the cardinal rule:

Never use a complex word

when a simple one would do.

Had I known the turn you took,

I'd have closed the bloody book.

The Physicist

When we met, your hair was already
white with the shock of new discovery,
fingers jittering with curlicues of equations.

Stray atoms shot through your eyes.

I was an intractable riddle, steeped in
a heavy fog of mystery, blinking

with the splendour of stars. You struggled
to break me into elemental parts,
balance my infinite variables. Still

I blunted theorems with Brownian
motion, rebelled against logic's steady
glide. To decode me, I demanded you

abandon method and tumble into mysticism.

There it was! The staggering beauty
as our orbits elide: pure propulsions
of energy looping into stellar spaces,
burnished suns flaring in radiance.

I never expected you to turn me against

myself. My sleep shook with calcified cities,
children with sloughed-off faces. I woke
to a body emptied of secrets, snuffed to ash,
to dust. I should have known you, Destroyer
of Worlds: finger crooked over the red button,

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galaxies collapsed into the coracles of your eyes.

The Lawyer

Do you remember the day you dug your father's
boat out from the attic? How you flung rib, rudder,
thwarts down from a hole in the ceiling? Didn't you
cobble its seafaring skeleton in your living room
laughing that the only thing you had constructed
successfully your whole life was a sentence? Didn't you
set me afloat alone on the bay? When you dove in after,
weren't we surprised this skiff could bear us both?

Didn't we row and row till our arms grew salty and aches
swelled deep, all to reach some semblance of the sea?
Were we not willfully blind to current drawing us back
to rock with the dogged repetition of a foundering
argument? The boat broke, didn't it? You thought it
the funniest thing—us at arms' length, bobbing in a snarl
of sodden plywood and regret. Weren't you foolish
to ever believe the two of us could settle without acrimony,
any finding of fault, the loss lying where it falls?

Bloodsucker

It was Wednesday when the welts first bloomed.

A neat row across your chest. Blood specking
each dark heart. Our bedsprings sang a new
sickening tune. Whiffs of raspberry rot slinked
in like languid houseguests. I got on my knees,

tapped door frames, furniture legs for echoes
of cavernous colonies. Boiled our pastel sheets
clean of roses. The bites came again, snaking
their way down your navel. I stripped you
naked at the door, beat out musk from

your clothes, eggs latched in seams. We slept
with all the lights on, a machine rattling
ultrasound. You worked late. Each night
spent with me grew shorter than the last.

Bites girdled your pelvis. I strapped on a mask

pulled apart the plump jowls of your favourite
armchair. Left the dog with the neighbours.

Then, our marital bed—tipped out twenty years
of conjugal bliss to the rag and bone man.

Stored the change he gave me in a Milo tin.

You moved out. 'DARLING,' insecticide noosed
my throat, 'ARE YOU STILL HAUNTED BY

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NYMPHS?' Your absence fumed through our flat,

scouring all the rooms. I opened the windows.

Began anew. You know, I never once found a bite on me.

Mute Swans

Two swans skim the
expectant lake. Secrets
stippled on water's
uncomprehending skin.

You tell me they do not
sing till death. I imagine
a wild inelegance of sound
splintering the flutes

of their necks. I think of us—
how we too, circle in silence,
waiting for our hearts to be
seized in a tumble of wings.