

She spoke in violence and pictures
of jagged cliffs made golden with sunlight
and lighting storms, rain fogging the lens
and dead planets iridescent with artistic license,
neon and aglow with mysterious non-science.

She never killed anything directly
but once broke a cat's leg trying to feel its heartbeat
against her own. Warm, struggling bundle of
limbs kick-slipping against her.

She wrapped her arms tighter and wondered if this was
what motherhood was like. It felt more like
trying to contain the sea in storm, slick fur and
blunt panic. One day she would be old,
she would know things. Perhaps with
the sea in her chest she would live to see it.

Please Listen To Me

After she turned twenty-two she began to speak
only in lines by people dead by their own hand.
She chattered in David Foster Wallace at the dinner table,
sang Sarah Kane and Anna Sexton in the supermarket aisles.
She fell in love with a man who spoke in smoke signal,
and chained cigarettes through every conversation.
I remember her eyes desperate, across the cinema seat arm,
nothing but Sylvia Plath on her lips - *out of the ash I rise*
and he, thoughtless, cruel! Could only huff and puff
at the curving, glittering screen; little clouds of excitement for
the film, not her and *with my red hair and I eat men like air*.
I love her, this woman, with her unwavering tongue and
stubborn, pleading eyes. I went out to Bali the other week.
I like the beach there very much, and the water suits me.
When I am done with this, I will go back.
She will turn twenty-three and learn to speak me.

Cab Home Alone

It is two in the morning.

"Weren't there two of you?" The cab driver asks.

No, uncle. Just me.

"But wasn't there someone with you, when you got in? I thought, all along, there were two of you."

Just a ghost, maybe, uncle.

"Aiyah. What ghost would follow you home?"

One of my own making. My nameless desire,
human-shaped and clumsy,
birthed in self-loathing and too much wine.

Threaded through: every odd dream I must have had,
every vague stirring I never learnt the names for,
every slow-burning itch-bleed bone-deep
every whine, small, saying maybe if I do this, speak like this,
hold my shoulders like this;
another human being will want to etch themselves
on me in finger-bruises and nail half-moons,
maybe someone will let me take their fingers
between my teeth and trust me not to bite down,
maybe someone will hold my head in their hands
and understand when I say that it is my heart;
a hurricane tangle-thread of wants and hopes
and questions. That sort of useless ghost, uncle.

I think this:

When I die, they cut open my head.

To put my brain in a machine so they can map out my

(I like to think of men of science laughing at me, for using the word *soul* in my application)

On the 3D scan

there will be bright dots burning furiously.

I can see it now. Holographic fairy lights,

little jeweled pixels embedded across the cerebrum

like looking out the window of a plane.

These will be your fault.

Your hands, light, fleeting, on my waist

in greetings, in goodbyes,

in see-you-soons and hey-good-jobs.

A hundred, small pin-sharp breaths

each time a minute re-calibration

as sensation is filed away. Hoarding them for winter.

I think of them mapping my store

across my temporal lobe, the hippocampus.

A dark spatter tattooed on the amygdala

where electricity once sparked like a startled rabbit.

What other proof will I have?

That someone used to put his hands on me

just because he could.

There's a trick that comforts me.

If I consume enough caffeine

and give up enough sleep

My hands

will begin to shake.

I like the feeling.

Of not being in control.

My hands vibrating on reality's frequency

Anchoring the rest of me

It feels like evidence

I have lived

I am alive.

The world has taken its toll on me and I survive.

It also makes me think of my father.

He taught me chess.

The economy of movement. The importance of stillness. Not to shift without intent.

He never taught me how to ride a bike.

He brought one home

and left it in a corner for me to learn how to journey alone.

He left books out
about the darker corners of the world
war
the decisions men make
and the mistakes men make.

My mother was the one who first taught me violence
But my father showed me how to use it.

I was never part of the plan.
The accident of my birth
set my parents back twenty years in the game of adulthood.
And now I watch twenty years early
As my father's body fails him
As the tremors begin to shake him apart at the seams
A constant-broken man no match, as he shivers out of existence
Trembling rendering him invisible
Spin the wheel
The genetic lottery
Ding! Welcome to the last decade of your life.

I know that it is a child's duty to bury their parent.

I know this because

When I speak to my father

He says things like

I have lived.

I am alive.

With as much economy of movement

and as still as he can force his body to be

He is trying to carry out his intent

That it is a parents duty is to teach the child

So

I drink

And I work

And I don't sleep

And my hands begin to shake

(And I feel like I've learnt something)

On My Mother (Companion to *Shakes*)

I do not write about my mother
Because I can only deal
with the unavoidable
one parent at a time.

When I Ride Bicycles My Brain Will Not Shut Up

1.

We are weaving in and out of traffic, for a moment
impossibly graceful as inertia hurtles us forward.

Every bump and depression on the road sending
shockwaves to the bones and god, my stomach is
in my throat and I cannot stop coughing and shrieking
sure that at any moment I will die, on a busy road
15,000 kilometers from home. All I can do is fix my eyes
on my friend's back, and hope to fuck I keep up because
I don't know this city, and I'm pissing myself in fear.

He cries out for me to look up, look what he can do, do what he does.

Throat unblocked he is crowing, whooping and his joy hits me
infecting me

For a blissful, singular moment I, too, am in flight
and foolish-drunk I take my hands off the handlebars
still staring, committing the line of broad shoulder
to memory and suddenly I think:

I want to be you.

And weightless suddenly reckless with power

I try on another version of that thought for size:

I want you

Recoil, sour-sharp in my mouth

Forget my throat my stomach has ricocheted off the walls of my skull

I am bewildered and guilty. Like I have just pissed myself in public

Sure everyone can smell it.

2.

When I was small I would stand at the skatepark
watching, half-hidden behind a pillar, as boys swooped
and crowed and smashed and crashed and got up again.

Blood was always a shock, but they shook it off easily
so I learnt to skin my knees and not cry.

I wanted to be a Lost Boy.

But I was not allowed the same bathroom.

I could screech as furiously and hit as hard

And I could be taller, stronger, faster than the best of them

But when I wet myself they were only kind and sent me away.

I wanted to fight the pirates, something, anything
race through forest and fall off planks and break my teeth on cutlass

I wanted to fling my body through space displacing molecules

Make the universe feel the violence of my existence

I wanted to wear my hair under a cap and have girls fall in love with me

Because that is what they do

And I wanted a girl to lay her heart bare for me,
in offering, so I could tear my disguise off and crow
in delight at my cleverness.

The Lost Boys never actually flew, did they?

3.

It was just Peter Pan. I am growing my hair out
and on a whim I line my eyes in black and turquoise.

Lipstick is an event. I walk up and down streets in challenge

Trying to speak in red and wax. I am mouthing a language

I have neglected to learn. War paint was meant to
invoke your battle-spirits, to allow the animal
to take your face and snarl your promises.

I don't feel like a warrior. I feel like a liar.

People look, too, in my other uniforms. They see
boots and black and greasy and they cross the street.

It does not please me anymore.

I am curious about another type of discomfit. About a different kind of power
that tight red dresses and crocodile purses seem to know.

I am learning. I still want someone to lay their heart bare for me
so I can crow and fly away. But that is childish and cruel.

4.

The children in the city are beautiful in the sun.

I stare, shameless, hungry. They move violently,
careless with their bodies. I find I am envious.

Of their newness, and how big everything is to them.

They are thoughtless with their delight. Carefree with their rage.

When they cry they bellow, lungs unstoppered.

I am romanticizing. I look at the faces of their parents.

Curating the whirlwind existence of their children

And I know I will not do that. Like Wendy realized,

I recognize bedtime stories and play-acting at Mother is not enough.

Lost Boys are rubbish at policing each other.

So instead I dress bright, baubled, and borrow children.

They flock to me, attracted by the colours.

I crow for them and they run away, screaming.

It is a good thing that in this city I appear quite benign.

5.

As we stop at the next traffic light on our bicycles

I don't believe what I've done.

I feel like throwing up with fear.

I have spent years circling below birds,

and occasionally creeping upwards and upwards,

learning the air closer to the sky. And learning how to look down.

There is a downhill slope ahead and I feel

relief, but also doom. I have become so

accustomed to moving at certain pace.

Shuffling below the window waiting for fairy dust.

Step by unavoidable step I must have left the nursery.

This feels now like hurricane careening back through the house

slamming doors open so I can peer in

and stirring up the sheets on every bed.

A moment. The road stretches below us.

We are side by side, my friend and I.

I do not know the way.

I am not the leader in my story.

My friend forges ahead, and I follow,

eyes on his back, floating above tarmac and taillights.

He does not crow. I am not a Lost Boy.

That back becomes my North Star.

Gravity, my straight on till morning.