Nerve Endings

Danielle Nicole Cooney

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NERVE ENDINGS

By

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& she planned to escape during the rosary before bed
& so she packed her bag
& so she kneeled
& so she slithered out the back
& so her father found her
& so the Spaniard with money on horseback waited
& so she never left
& so you are not Spanish
after Kith

what I know of the border is imagined
what I know of blood is salt
what I know of water is
insert a sword between the slats
of a ribcage & burst lung
tissue escape in flood

what I hear of the border is muffler
spit back daughter cross
river rosary round tight round
pocket tongue what I know
salt rub tequila agave summons
blood
Self Portrait: a visual history

I.

Freckles and cold hands
Mary Kay sales associate tells me
\hspace{1cm} \textit{You are so} \hspace{1cm} —
\hspace{1cm} \textit{your cheekbones jump} \hspace{1cm} —
\hspace{1cm} \textit{you don’t even need this but} —

So I buy $46 worth and count
\hspace{1cm} each of my freckles
\hspace{1cm} the number of breaths in a loose
\hspace{1cm} \text{eye} \hspace{1cm} \text{lash}

wonder if freckles do a good enough job
at deflecting scars from where the shards
of each season reside

\hspace{1cm} \text{organic shrapnel ebbs} \hspace{1cm} \text{flows}
II.

Shared shades of the same brown blink depth of chocolate dopamine levels choose iris I inherit from

women pass my vision to my niece her eyes still wider than mine as crows narrow the scope of forgiveness.

Never shielded from the blood we count her fingers and toes together she blinks

*y los ojos donde están*
she peels my eyelid with gentle fingers focuses both eyes palms on cheeks asks

*are you beautiful*
In 5th grade I played dress up
ten years old couldn’t zip dress up
aunt and mother tried said I wore this when
I was 20 said I borrowed this for a date
said it doesn’t fit don’t break the zipper I bet
it fits your sister

In 5th grade my neighbor and I woke up
sun barely yawned over Mount Baldy
we danced to Denise T. Austin videos proudly we
toned and slimmed the problem areas
IV.

La lengua
bajo la ley

wrapped round sweet
date baited by silent
hook through propriety

Mother taught mother taught me to crochet but never taught to loop spices into receptacle salt tinged
tongue predicted compatibility more knife than spoon serrated edge less than ideological I putter
hover infusing my hair with singed chile over open flame inherited flavor pairings like a grape soaked
in sangria I can stir in fuse polyamorous taste bud but

my tongue trips
pronunciation taut
like each stitch in coiled
braiding of a
  hot pad?
  unfinished hat?
  miscellaneous item
looped and un looped raveled un
attached I cannot teach my tongue to be
flexible to wrap around words once familiar now
clumsy I pour Tabasco on tostada con aguacate
tongue shies away from error shies away from dis
jointed reverberations un willing to admit

I am lost at the border
V.

I started drinking Slim Fast the same year
   I slouched through cotillion
rolled my eyes at white table cloth
yanked the ill fitting layers of self
rearranged skirt on lap
   arranged skirt on lap arranged
clicked heels together 3 times
   prayed for bare feet
      baggy tee
      jeans and scuffed
knee cap gash scar on crook of elbow like laugh too salsa for fox trot waltz
Rhythm
in these jointed
dis
embodiment
re
collective network of hip
flexor to fleece lined thigh
bone-in broth of calcified
melody between patella
and arthritic acceptance
of inherited policy. Sing

una piedra en el camino
me enseñó que mi destino
era rodar y rodar

Rolled ancho chile echo
round ankle bone into wave
of arched brow arced fourth position
never leaning into clouded
salida liberarse
via ball point toe heel toe.

1 “El Rey” by Vicente Fernandez, a song always sung in memoriam of my grandfather, El Rey de la familia Llamas.
VII.

Nervous smile sweaty palms
clip-on tie stepped on toes
considered running away
impracticality of
shoes

considered running in skirt and strappy

prayed for superpower
was instructed to smile
prayed for fire

Instead
Red Head with freckles (not like mine)
asks to cut in
doesn’t step on toes but apologizes for chapped lips
I say No One can tell!
I say No Body will notice!
(I coagulate. I

notice.)
VIII.

During tryouts in high school
Jenny says

you’re like really —
has anyone ever told you how —
we should set you up with football player
we should set you up with swimmer

fix my braid
- pull cap lower over eyes
- brush freckles away
- fold shoulder blades into diaphragm
IX.

In

hale

in Los Angeles I strapped a muffler to my mouth my nose gulped

in Missoula I held hands with cigarette smoke lingered in my hair
curled itself in resurrection dredged up my grandfather
same checkered shirt never fumigated
burnt coals in round basin barbeque
macetona

una toalla de papel por favor esa niña

memory made me wish for a scalpel scrape of my lungs made me
wish for a radiator flush of bronchial congestion rush hour heat

wax nostalgic wane

grief
X.

Relief was weight melted from my stomach

at 16 never been so
10 lbs. 4 days
once tight prom dress now
loose borrowed bracelet now
heavy cuff round weak wrist

Ken says you look like Audrey Hepburn

you look —

dreckles were airbrushed from the photo
basket w/ pear
  bite     list list list
given space
for a grain
  of cinnamon to pass
Doorway flicker
  slide paper

noose noose noose
Hic
  upon     gape
doors      mass
List list list
open desk drawers
eat food
hold hand
    when she pulls away
    hold hand again tomorrow
open one desk drawer empty
    contents one box of paper
    clips leave drawer open
hold hand
repeat the word *popular*
ignore the word
    *professional*
turn off lights
tell her natural light is better when
    she asks for fluorescence
open drawer again tomorrow
When I was 18 I lost my virginity on a Tuesday* not lost didn’t want it anymore why lost not lost donated or abdicated or didn’t. Gideon said on a Tuesday afternoon

_this isn’t rape_

& lips cold Gideon said on a Tuesday afternoon _say this isn’t rape_ on a Tuesday afternoon

_this isn’t rape_

What makes this palatable  
*omission of the time  
Tuesday afternoon after lunch after pickles Tuesday afternoon gray shirt from Target Tuesday afternoon cup of tea Tuesday afternoon no gray shirt Tuesday afternoon 1 pm Tuesday
Reflux

& when you speak
    your words are housed
in the tightened muscles of my shaking elbows
& when I think I’ve done wrong
    or I might have caused harm
    or fear of reprimand
the anxiety lives in my hip flexors
paralyzes my thighs
tremors race along my limbs from my spine
outward
& when I cannot control even the controllables
    the inability to pick out socks or
    clinging to poems that are doubtfully complete or
    any uncertainty
it lives in my stomach
threatens to escape through my esophagus
but not my mouth because my jaw
is clenched

the anxiety attempts to escape through my chest

& I wonder if there is now a hole in my esophagus
& I wonder how close it is to burning through my sternum
    an acidic singed gaping
    in the center of my _________
for all to see
painless
what is pain
pain is pain full
fill pain what
is full fill pain

it hurts here
  point to ceiling tile
it hurts in there
  point to brass knob
there is fire
  point to pillowcase
there is smoke
  point to music box
I can smell the rot
  point to baseboards

Lacquer every crevice
  all the porous parts of my body
Allow to dry
Repeat
Found two

walk When home
call leave walk
nowhere run
man cross when grope
when down way home
drop complex
house hid walk rest
see where I live
follow know no
time call
tope
Found third

quick
call me
things call and
leave turn around
until nowhere

tried
before
I lived

just a few
missing
sometimes
here we are
Found four

I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I

missing
unaccounted
transportation
blamed
goes on
fury
fury
fury
thread

I know how you feel!
sleep with the light on

when the monster under
your bed gets hungry
in the night you
won’t stumble when
you rise to feed
them

name the monster
Pickles or
      Claus

Pickles-Claus reminds
you to scrunch the
skin of your nose
when you smell
that diner side
tastebuds retreat when
you realize it’s
touched and sogged
the crust of your
turkey club on
sourdough
      reminds
you of your
intolerance for small
dark spaces intolerance
for rooms without
windows walls

Tell Pickles-Claus
      you’ve only just yesterday
begun to eat sweet relish
(a hint of monstrosity)

but the straitjackets
have been burned with
a whole book of small matches
Erased V.

November 15 at 10:29 PM

lucky  lucky  fear

unaccounted

  fury
Nerve Endings

lately death
lately dying

where does the energy go when we are grieving

the women in my family wake after surgery
crying not in pain in some sort of mourning
some sort of gauze-mit grip on reality bright
light timeline that summer I cried

the anesthesiologist said I rambled on about being elsewhere not belonging
there the bed swimming in and out of dreamed states
said I bargained for more of the before

the surgeon mentioned there was a chance I wouldn’t regain feeling in the parts of my leg that continued to prickle after I woke the repair successful all of it quite routine for otherwise strong ligaments and cartilage but for the obliterated tissue the surgeon said without the necessary invasion my knee would continue to function on a basic level would be capable of forward movement but no ability to change direction so the surgeon said the repair of the tendon was successful but for the unleashing of emotion but for the numbness in my shin that lingered after waking this worried me in the moment but less with time less when the dulled sense of engagement became part of how my shin now interacts with the elements only noticeable when I press into the skin after seven years taut the same way the gums around my molars house compressed timelines within my jaw each of these sensations alleviated by direct pressure

some nights we are all output
tonight is not that night tonight is all output contained

I reach for you across the bed
a phantom limb breath vibration
I learned to stack objects in the place you used to occupy I never liked taking
the entire bed and you know this but you haven’t
stacked objects you filled the space
in other ways dead
nerve endings scare me because I don’t
know the statistical likelihood of regaining
incalculable that feeling
by that feeling I mean you
I mean reaching out and not feeling
you feeling three half-filled notebooks
someone’s first novel someone else’s poems
about their dead father a box of tissues
a pillow paralleling my torso
pressing into my body to alleviate the pressure

at seventeen I needed to be pricked multiple times first the left and then the right they couldn’t
find the vein to sedate me for removal but I held still until I’d been pricked so many times my mother
intervened asked for someone different someone who could see through the translucent layer of skin
stretched over the pit of the elbow the drugs entered instead through the wrist and when I woke I
cried every time someone looked at me every time someone didn’t

earlier that same year K. Lange had reacted violently
vomited for days blood and Vicodin
her face swelled and bruised Violet Beauregarde minus the chewing
something about a snotty screenshot of her gauze-stuffed face
made me fear my own wisdom-tooth extraction
so maybe my veins went into hiding
maybe my nerves fought that battle for me
lost anyway still went under
who was the first one to say that thing about the pennies right before you get sick I don’t think I’ve ever tasted pennies maybe cotton maybe it is possible to taste shag carpet in the shape of a tennis ball have you ever thrown up in one of those small trashcans in a hotel you know the ones probably only meant for tissues or discarded notepad paper how about the bathroom of a Mimi’s Café maybe behind a retaining wall outside of a trendy new brunch spot in downtown Denver I know there’s nothing like hurling in the comfort of your own home but if you’ve never been sick outside of that French bakery where the fish from Pike Market mingle with fresh-baked bread and ground coffee maybe you should try it sometime maybe you should stick your head in a garbage can in the middle of a crowd and wonder am I pregnant a year ago I asked my nurse if the reminder card for my IUD removal is something I should put on the fridge asked if it came in a magnet form asked if they wouldn’t mind laminating it for me first my nurse offered to hold my hand I held my face instead covered my eyes but when I felt her move away I reached out just wanted her to stay nearby to laugh when I said next time I’d just shove a stack of pennies up there call it a day before moving to a new place most want to know about the neighborhood to know how the school districts are I google where the nearest planned parenthood is the cross-streets of the closest location for safe abortions this is preemptive this is because I never took stats never understood probabilities so I worry if I fall into the minority category of beings who despite plans with all the letters still feel that panic set in my best friend from high school fell for her architecture professor we know how that ended but did you know the more times you take Plan B the less effective it becomes did you know Plan B’ll only make you bleed if the sperm in fact ran the marathon made it met the egg all things I’m too afraid to look up for myself did you know those handful of years ago when it was you and me not her not the professor I did I bled occasionally I let my neighbors’ cats in with the understanding there’s no obligation
to linger they float out through different windows
we exchange pleasantries they’re never hungry
which I’ve always thought odd
occasionally I crawl into the bed of a man who isn’t you

he stands far enough not to touch me in the middle of a soccer field I’m doubled over he asks if this pain is normal I say of course I say have you never felt your uterus try to collapse in on itself in a cramp-scream objection to the voluntary insertion of a T-shaped object haven’t you been sweaty in front of someone you don’t really know except in a naked sort of way felt simultaneous bloating tightening when you double over you can only go so far upside down the roundness of your abdomen prevents you from actual relief I breathe in through my nose pant out a joke about adjustment periods blink back tears I know he won’t touch me in my pain I know he won’t do anything more except wait for me to keep walking I know he knows I won’t let him

I waited until morning to ask
what his worst injury was
explained I’d been thinking about distance
location separated tendons only admit to scars that are apparent to the naked examination he points to bruises suddenly fresh purpling I ask if he yells when he’s angry
Ulysses
I've never really known what cool is
but I know all the black and white photos sound
just like I expect them to
percussive sweaty alive

I like to walk by the skate park if I haven’t called him in a while
the familiar scrape of wood against a metal railing
dull thud of a body as it wipes out on the pavement
I only participated in my brother’s world when my mom wasn’t looking
cleaned the blood quickly but she’s known our little violences
watched them from the kitchen window

he’s only just recently realized his scowl lines match hers
two deep lines between thick brows a default
I wonder out loud what it might be like to get Botox
my brother wonders out loud if my mom tried to bury him in the suburbs
my mom dusts the photos she keeps in his old room
talks to them more gently than I’ve ever heard her speak

we buy the same shoes
maybe my mom thought if she got all her shopping done in one place
it was more of a convenience thing right
even after he moved out we’d roam the same store
I say my brother taught me to tie my shoes

my mom taught us to hold our grudges close
mine have latticed up the side of my body
when I lift my arm they stretch with me
my brother planted his or buried them or diffused them in the pacific

I’m better at secrets because I never learned to be sneaky
so I held them all for him for her and they’ve never met in the middle
never show each other the moon though they stand in the same crater
my brother fills with water my mother can’t really swim
I drink quickly use my hair to soak up the rest

neither of us knows god
only our mother
who prays with her hands in the dirt
he keeps time on a kick drum
this art is different in its sonics

we laughed the other day as my brother leaned against the doorjamb with his tears
that old Misfits t-shirt black ink peeking beneath the hem of his sleeve
he’d only reveal the new parts of himself on days
less likely for my mom to punish him with much more than a look
my first homecoming my high school graduation my birthday
his first piercing first tattoo a crow a skeleton a coffin

sometimes it’s hard to write about him or for him or to him
my brother’s willingness to feel is both terrifying and so very cool
Poem before a wedding

you wake early
weave pearls through the unruly
personality your hair has adopted
your mother says once twice
you are not the bride

Poem in a familiar hallway

In the darkness she is not
worried the moon
is not afraid of midnight
she agonizes over your return
to mountain ranges she cannot see
Lydia

She told her sisters she was underwater.

In the morning an inflated version of herself spent hours in front of the TV taking notes—decided the hills in her world were more Hollywood than Sound of Music:

Look, she wrote. My petticoats were heavy so I dumped them in the river. I don’t wear stockings anymore and together we’re exploring the Netherlands. Wickham was more mysterious when he was interested in you, sis; but the sex is still good so he’ll do for now. Come summer the heat will call for fewer exclamations! I’ll shake the sand from my hair into an envelope and let you know I’m not thinking about you.

The story ends with her throwing herself in front of a model train. She doesn’t wish for death just relocation; wants fewer instances of hollowed trees, further analysis of the fault lines. As a child she existed on shifting tectonic plates: friction-based shoulder blades. She ran from the chasm, stumbled, blamed the holes in her tights on bad luck like new shoes scuffing solid ground. After many months of this, she hibernated (yesterday) at a party, she confessed her love for the weather; wanted to talk about the stratosphere; instead another lesson in terrestrial politics. The new fault line upon which she found herself is one of convergence. Do dual existences on two separate conjunctive regions suggest a pattern? Is she indeed seeking instability? Is there something anatomically magnetic – the mineral composition of borderlands match: there is saturation of the absent.
Blue eyes

Whenever she steps into that house on Ave 28 she tries her hardest to leave her own whiteness at the door she knows that blue eyes would choke on the smoke of chiles roasting in a makeshift foil bowl over the open flame of a gas stove blue eyes would see the chipped paint on the red porch steps complain about the flies prefer to sit inside to eat blue eyes might think the music was too loud suggest turning it down so they don’t need to yell wince when they realize yelling is the only volume blue eyes might not know the difference between gunshots and fireworks – fireworks linger in their music fading out with color while gunshots are decisive final in their cracking exit of a chamber blue eyes had once called this side of her ghetto blue eyes could only ever be a guest if she invited blue eyes to Ave 28 she would have to be both translator and taste tester would have to lie when everyone laughs in Spanish pat blue eyes on the shoulder reassuringly shepherd blue eyes to the cooler for another cerveza both transient and permanent she had grown up adjacent to blue eyes for many years of her childhood she thought she might become blue eyes hoped maybe she could grow into blue eyes called blue eyes her friend.
Spell Catastrophe

Bathed in little moments of catastrophe,
I find myself dancing in the dim-lit
streets, arms raised in a prayer for apathy.

If I listed all the ways you’d laugh at me,
we’d drink deep puddles and set fire to our hair
and call ourselves catastrophe.

The wind and the window and leaves of oak tree
chant in the summer, flicker like stars.
Fire and puddles consume the apathy.

Why on the pavement do you not believe
when I tell you this was manufactured?
Man made my body spell catastrophe.

I’ve called and called the apothecary,
but he too held me at bay
with elevator music and apathy.

So if dancing in the streets remedies
the need to patch all my seams,
I’ll have either opened my arms to catastrophe
or decided you are enough filled with apathy.
Ix Chel vacations in Tucson

go light
swing forth
polish wall
with shoulder
    blade scrape
canyon       antelope
    smooth
    wave red
terracotta   foot
print disclaim
    'neath ankle
bone        bare

armored cuffs of ocotillo
limb fashioned from sticks
borrowed from Waverly
fence dried in dry heat
long snap gather & bind

small jut wrist
joint elbow mark

thorns    reach
west of sun drenched forearm
fend freckle
immortality
ocotillo armor
ancestral
    entities
combat void
    fallen
dark matter flecked
in leather
binding bloodied
thorn tip
Afterlife of an avocado

the avocado fell
gently from its branch

black & shriveled
sun scorched
liquid green stolen
from its skin

now small & light
enough for the raccoons
to play a game of catch
rather than keep it for dinner

or they might line wrinkled avocados
on their window sill
for decoration carefully
pluck & place dead avocados
with their long-fingers

add a raisin for comparison
admire the collection
of beautifully useless fruit
get hungry
eat the raisin
Hail Holy Queen—

mother of medicinal light sweetness & honey drenched claws mother of jagged ruin run in nylon blood on bronze fix chip in protection stone with clear nail polish fix shrine with obsidian fastened by ash of palo santo oda cubrir al fuego smother thee do cry

banished eve postmarked sigh cintura hiccup muñeca de la tierra

rota
My Catullus, well, he still thinks about me

Miserable woman! It is just the wind.
In the morning maybe there will be fewer
loaves of bread in your ice box & sweet coffee
will be your thing again.

Float notes down downwind to all the Catullies
who might have tried to rid themselves of you &
remind them of your mostly miserable
qualities. If that isn’t enough woman
tell them you’ve showered recently tell them you
have learned to tie your shoes in a way that’s much
sexier than the way your brother taught you
in kindergarten.

Miserable woman, paint deadened coral
on all four of your window panes. Paste on
leaves from the maple tree in your family’s yard
—the one with the ghosts of woodpeckers you
failed to keep alive. Imagine the thin skin
translucent sac for a belly with blue gray
organs & cover your light bulbs with a
similar film.

Miserable woman, you’ve got it now!
Keep an eye on the door you nailed shut. Woman
warm the spackle with your naked body, see—
it spreads more easily—seal the gaps. Miserable

woman sing into the fire
wish your friends well wish them
in the fire a well of fire wish them
a key that opens nothing sea shells with no
ocean in them umbrellas with decorative
tears & thank them for adorning your mantle.

Miserable woman, how lovely you’ve done.
Jaime lodged in my tonsil I realized my mistake I begged doctor por favor feel the blood
tickle my throat place my lips around a ghazal inhale deeply but to no avail I allow
my vocal cords to trap the fumes in my larynx María shoots tequila to ease the irritation but I
collect ash from the butt of a roasted chile la sangre de mi madre y la madre de mi madre y la
madre de la madre de mi madre dice fuego I used the ash from the chiles on the burning
mountainside dam my arteries pooling the liquid until hide and seep the alloys of our
bloodline into recipes de la lengua rests behind a row of fake teeth I slide my ear across the
table instead of pozole grasp

Fernando in rehab
Sylvia called laid claim to tamales she did not make
will Rosa stop by for lunch
when do you leave (again) where will you go (again) when will you be

still

que dios te bendiga mi reina
Dear Jaime –

I cannot write about how much my mother loved you I cannot write about how much my mother mourns you I cannot write about how long it has been since disease riddled your humanity how long it has been since your voice cradled the rolls of my toddling legs the pudge-palms that cupped your sunken cheeks scruff of your chin I cannot write that I only knew you in death I only learned what AIDS was in high school forced to visit your grave forced to visit your father’s grave I felt nothing but fear at the nothingness I felt when I confronted the stained glass of the chapel you were not in your bones covered by grass I cannot write your spirit has never left Ave 28 I cannot write that we all have dreams of you and your father though we could not protect you from what la frontera did to the fissures in your glial cells to my mother when they left you to your mother when you wrote the letter that should never have been sent you protect us from the hippocampal lapse in the pozole I cannot swallow boiled garbanzo beans skulls that can be crushed by two molars I will not
Dear—
Half-cavernous change ear tuned to lake at sunrise rather engage in fisticuffs with the pacific at dusk it thrashes back raw ribboned mangled ribcage meat tenderized by salt and palm hovered over sea slug resistant yet malleable at boiling point where planar tangentiality calls out to me now in the packed valley snow

Would god mind terribly if I drank the holy water would I be communicable in fingertip not of frond but of tailbone see back for instructions god is a god is a god saw the deer with dangling eyeball I saw cascading orange and yell fall wondered what season did you choose when you left us what season did you choose when your ribs began to show your own eyes sank into your soul wondered did you ever taste snow
I think I don’t know

I think I crawl inside a small space you know
like somewhere near the pancreas somewhere
it’d be hard to find
I tell her the worst thing god did to us was caloric
also pretend that life is actually only
a vacuum of calories
or the absence of them and obviously
this is not something I believe but it’s something
I can tell her over text because all we’d really like to do is get high
float down stream instead we get stuck
in an eddy instead I fight
the monster under the bed in the closet in the mirror instead
pull
the bottom of my shirts to stretch them into something
that might better swallow the calories consume
my waltz in the middle of the street and wish
it was a freeway wish the cars would roll up on some giant
crime wave wish the red sea instead might collapse
but I think saltwater might shrink the shirts might burn
my lungs like I tumble want to know shrapnel
they’ve only seen me detonate once in the mountains
twice by the sea I think I know
the beauty of demise is I’m considerate of others
I implode and there is no real cause
for concern until there is
an absence
recognized the monster under the bed whimpers
it’s lonely someone is unnerved
by the stillness what’s that again
a dwarf star collapses into a neutron
star maybe something less grand a fist
full of sand squeezed so tightly it all seeps out
the star-shaped hole your curled-up pinky makes
after all the sand escapes I create an orbit
rather weave a net with my hair with the fray
the edges of cut off jeans with this web
substance that clings silk worm cocoons
out of a Stephen King novel but like one that’s gone on
too long said too much like when I touched
my hand to my stomach and pulled it away
there was the stuff so I reached out caught one
by the hem of his shirt and pulled him in
demanded he know nothing and when he said this
is my only shirt I said
I know this place that has ice cream in winter
I think I don’t know there’s beauty again
I don’t think praying mantises have webs or take the ones they catch out for ice cream just before shooing them back to Iowa I don’t think they insist on tequila or maybe they do maybe because everyone forgot their birthday maybe because a preying mantis is actually a nuclear bomb
No te llores

I.
The rain breaks
   inside
my ribs open
cracked split pried apart by hands
I memorized the feel of as they harvested
all the unguarded selves

del the trick was to celebrate the exposed
intentionally raw
gaslit into forgetting
prone to infection

II.
my sister was sutured back together
with staples
you know this    the zipper scar
you’ve seen my mother she holds
a bloodied sheet in front of me

I have been shoved back
into the elements cradle
my ribcage like broken shutters
my mother was pried open in a different way
she waits for me to gather the parts
I wait for decomposition
Fish in the city of angels / an aquarium / dentist’s office / work together to brave the top / are attempting to escape they must be new / the others haven’t told them yet it’s only suffocating / if you breathe / more deeply / risking loss / the smaller fish chase one / another nipping at brightly colored fins homecoming / queen fins regurgitating sand / from the floor of their forever home

dissected frogs and flowers / in these labs lasted / no longer than a few / hours in one week’s time but sometime / between fourth grade and sophomore year / we accidentally kept a prize gold / fish alive for over three years (for reference / the only other fish we had won from the same fair / another year died during the three-minute car ride home) (for reference / my sister’s health did not allow for walking in summer / heat and the other fish’s health did not allow / for my sister’s careful holding / of the plastic bag) but the prize / gold fish survived multiple attempts / at an unorthodox road to freedom perhaps / we did not help it feel at home we could never / settle on a name sometimes Goldie / sometimes Rainbow after the children’s book we were so fond of sometimes / something very suburban / like Kevin or Simon or Chad or another / time Brownie and another time Sunny

in a small resort town / in northern Minnesota I would catch sun / fish and examine them closely to see my reflection / in the scales happily wave / goodbye as an uncle or cousin would release it / back into the river and into the river / my line would go / once more I never wondered if I had caught the same fish twice but twenty years / later I wonder can fish blink do fish get splinters do fish get tired / of homes and dentists / aquariums small faces / nose to gaping mouth how many / times can a hook go through a fish lip / until the fish refuses to go / for garden worms / I wondered had a fish / in its own water ever been told / go back to where you came from / but where they came from was more water
When Los Angeles was burning

More stifling than the last time
we might see the brick high
school on the mountainside

uncharred. We are advised
to leave water out for passing
coyotes, for the mountain lions and bears,
the hunters forced to break beyond
the tree line. We are advised to remain

inside with our allergy medicines and phones
with packed emergency bags primed for quick
escape. I heard in Hawaii when the volcano
erupts and envelopes the mountainside with its own
destruction, it does so leisurely. Victims

of this version of what we call natural
disaster walk alongside the creeping magma mourning
their losses with each swallow of their home or
car or paved cul-de-sac. How futile the battle
against a molasses-like terror. Ten years later

in a lecture hall in Tucson, I waited
to hear if family and friends had been evacuated
or not. Somebody on Colby trail left
the singed end of a joint or didn’t extinguish
the camp fire properly or any range of human
error. The professor took the opportunity to dissect
the biological implications of a forest fire while homes
collapsed and entire freeways were halted

all ten lanes in a narrow pass between matching
flaming hillsides at a rush hour stand still all hours.
The flames lick at the sky, brown and charcoal gray,
hazier than our normal smoggy commute and we where
the 10 freeway merges with the 57 north it’s been so long
I can’t recall if there was death. It’s been

so long that an orange California mountainside
and a fiery sunset might blur, one terrifically
beautiful, the other beautifully terrifying. Our
children cannot quite tell the difference.
Elbows

When I ask if you’ve read any good books lately, what I mean is take me to Alaska; what I mean is I want to make pancakes; what I mean is I want you to hold my hand in a strip club. Come visit me. I’ll hand you an envelope polaroid inside shredded with my teeth; all the pieces are there probably. Listen: the polaroid is a picture of me in the back of a cab on my nineteenth birthday; I have some scotch tape and a book of matches. You'll choose the tape; it'll be the wrong move.

When is October. I heard your voice the other day and ran back to the saguaro. Here we first met, locked our bikes nearby or I locked my bike somewhere and you locked your bike somewhere and I’ve lingered. If we were alone six years ago, I’d have convinced you to leave me;

Did you feel the way the sand shifted when you reached into my cerebellum. Do you want me to send you a card next month or maybe yesterday after I finished the dishes. If I scribble the way I feel about motorcycles and linguistics onto a napkin folded into an airplane with flimsy wings, will you soak it in red wine before you tell your mother about me. Will you collapse into a bird’s nest asleep with your eyelids open; will you navigate your way back to me via sound or smell; are we on the way.

Did you hear about the woman with bees in her eyes; they fed off her tears. You tell the bees they would starve if they met me; I could not equivocate exoskeleton with cage and maybe that’s just it: I couldn’t give you enough of the organic tissue; I didn’t know that was what you wanted when you said you needed more than spoons or pizza deliveries. My spoon count is limited but here, take them. I want you to have them so you’ll stay, so you’ll ignore the expiration date, so you’ll sit across the table from me and know the table is an easy distance. The table could be more bridge than barrier. If not elbows, what body part would you prefer.
Isn’t it

In the mornings take note of the way
you’ll unravel loose strands of my hair
from sheets & pillowcases & borrowed
t-shirts. I am long gone & that’s okay
isn’t it. Never belonged inside nor out
never belonged never a who always a what
& isn’t that so possessive isn’t it just
yet this movement is lonely I’m telling you
I wanted to belong to moments wanted
something between a look across the room
at a party for leaving & a straitjacket. Indication
of closeness or desirability or home isn’t it
strange how in search of home one leaves
all familiar particles behind justifies running
with never belonged here when it’s not really
places but feelings like that time with the donuts
in the driveway on a warm summer night
in cutoffs & big t-shirts now that was home
or on the long road trips to colder climates
I’d wake him up to look at the sunrise over
the ridge as we wound about the mountain
& he grumbled in the passenger seat
& that was home I thought knowing the name
of the bartender was home but it wasn’t
enough because when the older Black man
who liked the thickness of my eyebrows
told me he’d learned silence keep your mouth
shut we looked at the whiteness around us
so now maybe I guess this can’t be
home later that night, our server gave me a burger
when I’d asked for breakfast then said he didn’t
get why racist comments would upset me you look
white & that isn’t home & couldn’t I
take the advice I too have tried to find god
though I don’t especially care for silence.
A bar called Gentle

she straddles her lover on a chair with no arm rests : what were they worried about : it’s not them : or the monsoons : in a different August they could have been here : charitably donated to themselves : keep in touch : no I’m not sure we belong here : placement tests and dress fittings : I don’t need your help anymore : time for her is binary : the chair and the legs and the kerosene scent : water in the desert : she spits out nopales forgotten : where has she gone : suddenly : the lover and the chair decide their existence was indeed improbable : she tells me this in the bathroom of a bar with chalk scrawled love notes and gentle in the name : occasionally fuck [name of fabricated inhabitant of the seat behind you] : stop the sketch : she pulls her hair back and asks again : is the mirror really there or : have we finally removed the miscalculated angles and slopes : reshaped them on the visual plane in front of us : I supported the earthquake : I supported the convergence : I confess to her : the lover and the chair existed in a previous stall : the world itself : quasi-tangible particle residue : prickly pear : the scale with which we now measure : what is this place
still screaming in some ways in some ways mostly silent and yeah I like rules because that one night on an exit ramp in the before now time my mom gripped the steering wheel and my brother broke the passenger window of our minivan with his elbow jumped and my sister and I stayed strapped in tightly through all of the rolling and in the gauzy piecemeal memory that is both trauma and childhood the arch of my left foot ate a shard of glass and the driver of the car that hit us was a forest green cable knit monster with no face and the firefighter who carried me out of the minivan that wasn’t ours anymore was wearing a helmet just like I’d imagined when I said when I grow up I want to be a firefighter so in 6th grade I wrote my name with yell in it and maybe that was my truest edition

still yelling the way you do when you’re at a show and then suddenly the band says they’re taking a break between sets but you’ve had maybe one too many jack and cokes because you’re nervous about your best friend meeting the guy you thought was a one night stand and also also also at the same time nervous the guy you thought was just a one night stand is maybe a more than one night stand because he knows your name isn’t Sara and there’s something again about jumping through windows and he saves you from the before now time from the blue eyed moon and now my voice is the only voice anyone in the bar can hear
Route out

Turn left at the arranged succulents where I asked you to write down the telephone number for that cottage by the fish hook a right beneath the blue shutters shivering as dragonflies hunt mosquitoes and you tell me humans were involved dogs are sickened by the blue algae that slickens the rocks beneath the dock glide in gently tie the knots process whether or not you could picture your books tucked into this crawl space or rather fix your gaze through the eastern facing windows and imagine poetry streaming through over the water a hand splayed on a breakfast nook table stained a sweetened coffee brown I'll be in the canoe jump from the retaining wall after checking the traps by the screen door and calculate your hope for a smooth wake over the width of the widest oar as it floats up stream
Blue eyes
it’s been a while, but the past few days haven’t
wondering if you wouldn’t mind being broken
alongside can’t fix & only recently seen me
in a fractured sense I’m still whole you say
is this worth moving to & from see
before you go will you hold me at moon
wished for porch light or snow won’t you
footsteps overhead hand on jaw just wanted
waited wolfling into Saturday not gone I
fault ready full stop hangar if I expend my capital
no response game in theory we would
funny how if some fury how if one
don’t hurry worry up I’m
aren’t you empty yet
J | or | Twelve is many lives

& I’ve only got one
egg left in the fridge

Big Mike sits at a table I haven’t met
& we don’t yet touch except yes
when I splash coffee on his knuckles
because the table is too small
& these boots aren’t
broken.

This is before I wear his space
jam t-shirt & I remember
J has a poem about this
J is not the same J is not Big Mike
who will let me know if he’s ever busy
outside a woman fumbles with her bike lock

& I wonder who Grace at a party was
& I wonder would we have
been friends then.

Twelve is many lives &
I don’t check if the egg is still
good before frying it. I’ve checked
other eggs on other days
when I had a fridge with fewer shelves &
no demand for attention.

I worry I’ve said too much &
not asked the bees enough
about their figure eights &

I think I have to go to the airport
where the bees can find me but I worry
they’ve never seen planes. I wonder
if J notices my pattern
because my pattern was J &
not figure eights under spot
lights when twelve is many lives &
another J in the parking lot who is the same
as the J on the retaining wall
running fingers along the fringe
of my hair three years ago &
J is blue eyes is also not the same blue
as this year or this summer this J is not
the mountain or the porch but J is
the name I gave to a small cat once &
not the same cat I let into my house
briefly but yes, the one I loved J & cat &
not.
Tentatively, we go

I’m waiting for the bus in my pajamas
and that’s probably truth
is you gave me your gloves
I watch the way your hands move
along the steering wheel can’t
breathe in the space between you my kitchen sink
I lied about the bus and the pajamas but you knew
that already the cold brew in mourning your hands
don’t feel like moon landing hands say broken
implies capability culpability you read
thirty minutes when you wake I think I’m in love
with the pup the floppy ears and thank you
for the gloves coffee voiced again
let’s please here in time for next whenever you feel so inclined
Resistance

flagrantly I wanted you to be blue
eyes but there you are with flecks of green
gold the space closed I watch you
watch me unbutton your shirt
pull back the shower curtain
lean across the arm rest
you are not forever I am
not the one yet I tell you, baby deer
here I am point to the suitcases
look what I brought with me in the middle
of the night you rolled over to pull me
into your chest in the middle of the bed
I left my ribbon pushed back said
I was comfortable the way I was
a supernova in the crook of your elbow
let each molecule buzz in singularly
like wasps stammering into the rafters
the nest has grown
my radius and ulna are estranged
the angle at which my forearm contorts
is just comfortable enough for me to sling
around your neck, rest there
Untie
will chamomile and snowfall heal
or is there time another earthquake
before I extract myself from you
when I am unfinished
mired in noisy applications
of my ache please don’t
unlove me don’t untie memories
from the now I cannot breathe in this
arbitrary arrangement sound like
echoed uncertainty I thought
sonnets were love songs and this—this—this is
a battle cry if battle cries arrived
at the end of the movie from the back
of the crowd looking for directions home
Thumbprints

*after CD Wright*

home: avocado tree
home: cracked chimney
home: burnt chiles
home: baseball cap pulled low
home: social and security and compacted anxiety
home: beneath spot where left clavicle meets socket
home: soft skin of lacquered brick
home: voicemail
home: fences also no fences
home: smog bumper
home: fracture
home: thumbprints

most likely to die: succulents under careful watch
objectively cute: skunks raccoons small mammals w/ people hands
questionable: witchcraft in a dark classroom
undeniable: witchcraft in a dark classroom
patience: grandmother
faltr: can talk later
between: just need an extra copy
lunch order: hands on each arm
invoice: for the reversal of human deterioration
valet: emergency

substance morning: improbability
going steady: burrowed toes under your thigh
half felt: go get help
felt whole: ice cream on a birthday
february: never needed to leave to feel cold

when: south southwest
most likely to lose: connectivity
funny story: what
sorry: a little late
qualifications: romantic development of a resumé
worst case scenario: kissing

p.s. what am I doing wrong
Return to the barter system:

It is both lucky and unlucky your first-borns are sons, traded for gold and a curse you didn’t know was included in your monthly subscription. Your sons are soft philosophical musicians peacefully refusing to partake in even the gentler torture like fingernail removal. It is your daughters who have always been primed for battle, who have leveled men with the debris in their orbit, slash through crowds with teeth bared and brows hell-arched on avenging their sisters, mothers. Your daughters, like you, have scoured over and over the landscape, gone so far as to remove their reproductive organs and plant them along the foothills where photo synthetic processes are most generous. Your daughters have instructed your sons on how best to tend land. Your sons are not their fathers. Your sons have learned the exact frequency at which your memory reverberates. Your sons can hear this scale but it is your daughters who have inherited the titanium rib cages. It is your daughters who now absorb the blows you shielded your sons from when you placed your body within door jamb. Your daughters are unbending in this climate; it is both lucky and unlucky.
Saltwater

A hurricane delivered my mother
clearing a path through the village
She was given a tongue of salt
she sequestered within an altoid tin

tentacles coil   cling
to ragged bits of the supernova
each tendril well-versed
in the quantum mechanics
of the perfect queso fundido

tolten cradled by lava rock
excavated from the depths
of an antique hatbox
hidden in a trunk that houses
carefully folded sweaters
hand-embroidered pillowcases

salt falls from hidden cracks in her exterior
as my mother held bobby pins
between her lips
attempting to shush my baby hairs

I turn my tongue to the ocean
to catch the salt
so I may exfoliate my words
deliver them more gently
in preparation for the next hurricane
The sun is taken for granted

for Roberto

I.
He wrote to his mother

I wish I had died

maybe

I wish you had let me die
I never read the letter

II.
Her birth brought the hurricane
or the hurricane coaxed her into this world
both were blamed for the aftermath
by the witnesses who feared salt water
deja la niña para limpiar
overturned shuffle debris
place driftwood on altar in lieu of Jaime's letter

III.
Together they crossed
river on horseback
primer el rey
segundo el caballo
Ana María Jaime Celia
this coffee tastes like
Jaime started to fall asleep
to the side of the saddle
she can’t remember who caught him
her hands my grandmother’s hands god’s
the river smoothed the bed beneath the horse’s belly
Lipstick machete

convict me of light
red with the parched canyon dust
of silenced outrage

how easily these tendons tear
my ancestors whisper
what is mercy
I will burn you quickly
without permission
careful not to spill the embers
onto this mountainside
made fertile by tears
made fertile by the hands of my ancestors
made green again by layers of skin
grated from my body

what is left when all traces of transgressor are removed

    reconstruct vocal
cords from braided reeds
peel the exoskeletons of floating
    microaggressions
sharpened into nails
    map each unwanted touch look gesture sound
with machete palm
    hammer them into a wooden headstone
present headstone to jurors for them to see
remove each nail for them to see
hold holy headstone up to the sun for them to see
Dark Matter
rumbles
trash truck dumps
confetti at my feet

I put my shirt on inside
out today noticed
my hair had gotten longer
stomach-length

You’re not a danger
to yourself but hurricanes
don’t have mirrors
don’t crumble you
pull butcher knives
splinter tables
shatter glass until spent

do not go gently rage rage

I see debris in your sunken eye
powder dissolves, doesn’t it?
secrets safe in capillaries
I wait for you to dump them
like confetti at my feet

I wanted to leave cacti
on your kitchen counter
but thought maybe
succulents thrive better
during hurricane season
from DA Powell

Last night we invoked a bee
Last night we invoked a bee & a prairie
Last night we invoked a poet last night
we invoked
   tremor
   crumble
Last night we invoked fire
Last night we invoked two marys
Last night a speeding Ferrari
Last night fear of sobriety
Last night fox gloves
   & slinking panties

Last night my uncle told me to call his mother
   heard him couldn’t listen
   can’t recall his birth date / death date
   can’t recall the sound of his voice but
   a shift in the haze that circles the moon
   & he is in the split of my radius

oh oh already & oh
am I not your sun      dying felt her own sides cave in
stifle the carbon dioxide pockets escape in balloon
last night immaculato

Last night we invoked slow onslaught
Last night the onslaught harbored
we harbored the onslaught invoked by the bee invoked by the prairie
Last night we held the circle last night we held
Today I have told you nothing tonight I held you hostage
can one fit this nothing under tongue.
Poema de los Espíritus

I.
When I want to summon you
wherever you exist
I will leave the Felix the Cat magnet on the front of the fridge
An offering of chicharrones & gorditas
cabbage & cotija (grated so finely
on the dining table
I will crawl beneath the chairs to meet you
Blue platos con las flores passed from your mother’s hands to mine

II.
We do not eat yogurt in the living room
unless your great aunts take pity
They are generationally removed
a pinch above the elbow on the fatty
layer of your radius/ulna biologically
distant

III.
The mailbox is full
Please repackage your voice in a material that is
texturally palatable  I am implying that I do not like the taste
Please repackage your history in a language that is
visually palatable  I am implying that I cringe at your trauma
Please repackage your identity in an attitude that is
more pleasant  I am implying that you are un)pleasant

IV.
Nathan Gonzales told me I can not
play sudoku in pencil
pencil is cheating
pencil is cheap
Nathan Gonzales did not have cheap pencils
or peechee folders
Nathan Gonzales in seventh grade did not reuse folders from
third grade
Nathan Gonzales in 2007 is not
Nathan Gonzales now
Nathan Gonzales bought me a beer and said his mother is praying for us
said it’s good that someone still is
Nathan Gonzales lent me a pen in middle school
I never gave it back

V.
You are a mirror of myself
I am hard where my mother was hardest
pliable in all the ways
your father was not granted leniency

We do not spit
I do not tell your parents
I do not tell my parents
I show you how to clean up your own
revolution