

## Feet of Clay: A Poetry Portfolio

Artificial Intelligent Design

(1)

When Prometheus bent down, waist bent  
     down to our earth,  
 Spilling ash from his lips,  
     grey kissed,  
         charcoal fingertipped  
 with gravity he  
 gifted man with death,  
     burning flesh  
     dripping fat  
     thousands tasted  
         human sacrifice:  
             progress.

the Historian wishes  
     to wet his tongue on mouths  
         coated with ash;  
         delicate melted powder lipstick  
             chin bent, a caress  
                 with a flask  
             sip! from before the fire  
 to ask "Do you know?"

to grab by the shoulders  
 and shake  
     crying wildcat eyes,  
 "DO YOU KNOW?"  
     Do you reach  
         smiling, grinning, beaming with tearfilled eyes  
         and grab death by the shoulder,  
         spin them around for  
             a moment of bliss, passion, a kiss:  
             embraced, swaying, noses breaking  
             pressed until enamel cracks  
                 shattered gums and swallowed blood  
             choke blue to the face  
         with a generous smile?

or,

Will you stumble

flat, reeling back  
on your heels, weak  
and bleary eyed, knees  
pulled close  
like a stuffed bear  
poured onto an oily pavement,  
drops of phosphorus, cracking  
bones in the flame to read  
a fortune,  
*Death by Fire*  
to read a future  
not yours?

the Author wishes,

to know the taste of embers before the flame,  
to wonder if death will kiss the same.

(2)

We should be functional, live, 2020  
 forecasted, but probably late  
 podium straight, ties clipped  
 cord cut.  
 10x more, more orders, orders of magnitude more -  
 greater than our conception of big,  
 our infinities raised to Higher Powers  
 and Higher Powers  
 and Higher Powers.

Beyond us, posthuman, human+ (the Professional Model);  
 My grandmother, fingers wrinkled skin strong pulled  
 the needle herself:  
 How would I weave wire between  
 the folds of my fleshy thoughts?

The vaccine is inhaled, I feel the toxic cure  
 flow freely, down my pleasure centers  
 and neuron receptors, serotonin rich with  
 the internet of things;  
 the fever is breaking, quickly!  
 throw the thermometer down, freedom!  
 it holds no answer any more.

Bandwidth rubber bands hold a collection  
 of straws, pulling my brain through my nose so  
 I'm connected to the afterlife,  
 heart in a jar, scented  
 wrapped in the finest foil -  
 good for later.

no priest.  
 no rites.  
 no line to wait in.

God yanked from myself,  
 ripped torn and stoned  
 a prostitute, whored  
 to serve me sugar,  
 stuffed back inside like  
 mentos in Pepsi;

bought to taste the metallic gates of  
 virtual Nirvana,  
 instant gratification:  
 orgasms at shutter speed  
 scattered dashboards, foodporn:  
 a delicious newsfeed.  
 I feel Google's face with the back of my fingers,  
 a bathroom mirror-  
 I wonder what the man,  
 my twin outside the glass  
 with glassed eyes  
 thinks  
 of my perspective.

a touchscreen grabbed me

once,  
 grabbed me as a boy  
 shaking my shoulders  
 tears  
 sprinkled on my nose,  
 dried skin on pillows  
 mothkissing my earlobe;

I remember it was gravity  
 of dots and blackness  
 following fingers into spirals  
 condensing, thickly,  
 before spirals outward of light  
 lines made trajectory paths,  
 free app download  
 now in browser windows,  
 when, after hours,  
 a cool glass pressing on bare skin  
 between bedsheets  
 with eyelashes out of focus,  
 seeing faded museum plastics  
 I lied gazing open eyed –  
 pillow-headed, eyes reflecting muted starlight,

wondering

Neural Lace//ration

I feel one half inch in every direction, bedside monitors show the buckle of my skin;  
 My mother said my blood was blue-red - imagine my surprise at oxygen-rich indigo:  
 a crayon smudge of sticky color leaking from a blood vessel needle-broken,  
 open, coated in ink dipped from marrow and traced, lightly with thread;  
 gentle, running in smooth diagonal and curved plastic tube, tracing a wrist-shaped circle:  
 who knew that flesh was not made of glass?

This morning wasn't opened with windows but a soft touch on sapphire glass,  
 a stretching and pulling of taffy-like limbs to reach across the border of my most sensitive skin.  
 My eyes lean back and relax, allowing icons and dots to pull themselves to a circle –  
 no, not flat: the space between homescreens is a rich and sweetly thick indigo;  
 my separation is thinning, slimmer, a cross-section of rope my grandmother called thread,  
 it feels pregnant in the margins, a plastic wrap condom only barely not broken.

I don't know what it means if the blood brain barrier is broken,  
 But I would imagine it shatters with the sound of rain made of glass –  
 my thoughts like seashells, hole-punched, pulled through with thread:  
 a seamstress and tanner take care to not poke holes through the skin,  
 but I fear myself leaking from a pore into bedpans of burnt indigo –  
 I always thought that, from the bottom of crowns, the head was a perfect circle.

On hospital beds stiff pillows support me in a sterilized circle,  
 I feel penetrated by vectors and marionette wires un-broken.  
 I almost wish I could stop the leaks of information coming in  
 to go back to a screen of pulsating stars and curved glass:

There is something primordial about the panic I see in a gap in my skin,  
a nauseous resignation in pinching two flaps shut with soluble thread.

But between my mother's hands - how can there not be a diaphanous thread?  
a spinal curvature that tickles my cheekbones when her arms hold a circle?  
How is it possible to cry if you're protected by the millimeter thickness of her skin?  
if she leaves, I wonder at windows which part of me is broken;  
Dizzy, I call a nurse: I feel translucent, doctor, with bones of whisper-blown glass -  
a vessel of eddies and currents flowing rich with indigo.

He pats my head, gives me an orange slice, letters my skin in ink a muted black indigo  
I feel barely connected, an incandescent bulb dangling by thread.  
When I wake up I feel halved, cross eyed, a vision half glass,  
I wonder what part of me was half-guessed and erased in semi-circle.  
Will I pass the bathroom mirror and claim a reflection not broken?  
Will I see a tendon and muscle-taut outline under the skin of my skin?

My hands tremble holding glass stained with fingers colored red,  
The sewn skin on my scalp is wired through with electron-thin thread;  
Place the circle upon my forehead – do not mind the broken end.

When I was a Magician

I can remember moments  
tasting cinnamon notes of magic  
suspended in my open mouth, resting

on my tongue with a crackle;  
a thinly threaded scarf of bright hope  
coloring the curls around knuckles

plucked away into a palm and a breath  
less moment as the scarf becomes air  
inhaled into pigment-rich lungs.

It is unfortunate that I learned plastic  
thumbs filled with faded color could spell  
“cinnamon” on blue-lined paper.

Years would cut apart my tongue in half  
shredded paper strips that could taste only blue  
litmus and crushed red pepper, thankfully

I can remember moments  
tasting tarragon hints of magic,  
easing gently out of boxed memory

I can turn to my open places  
where I forget the taste of salt, to remember  
later as glass snowflakes with sharp edges.

I used to see everything as red candy  
coated and sweet with soft sepia sugar –  
a sleepy crust I tugged off my eyelashes.

Everything I taste now is in empty bowls  
surely bursting with pigment-rich threads –  
Perhaps I will pluck scarves out of my lungs, gently

releasing them back to sacred air  
to dissolve like spun sugar in sunlight  
sorcery: a brief kaleidoscopic rainbow.



The Door to the Playroom on the Day after Christmas in 2009

The corner is bitten, chewed up,  
    brittle strips of wooden taffy  
    edges pulled into strings,  
a toothpick and chewing gum glaze.

Black marker signatures, slim and faded  
    barely erased licks of mucus  
    dripping with old wax,  
a coat of yesterday's color.

An involuntary twitch, or perhaps –  
    a purposeful quarter-swing,  
    hand flicks  
    skims the side of my jeans, it's  
    an anxiety, misplaced yet -  
        my pinkyfinger lifts a millimeter away from thighs in front of me,  
almost  
in anticipation.

In my mind,  
in my limbs,  
    I feel my arm extended,  
    an insubstantial concrete hand  
        yet I can almost taste my own skin stretched forward  
            out to the tin knob,  
                stretched like yarn,  
                    grasping.

It's just a doorknob, an old invention,  
 a worn item of use so regular  
 never seen  
 a shape so palmlike  
 it can never be felt.

I cannot grip it, my clenched teeth and taut wires of pain tell me so  
     my months spent watching  
     family movies  
     while the therapist leaned over me  
         breath in my face  
         lifting off the ground as they press down on my arm  
         shaking with strain as they grab my wrists  
         shaking their lips as they twist with superhuman strength

*Aladdin*, foregrounded, watched through clenched tears

I hear:  
     “this will make you better”

I cannot turn it.  
 the doctor last week -  
 the doctor after the orange waiting room -  
 the doctor will meet you shortly -  
 the doctor I'm seeing for the 6<sup>th</sup> time -  
 the doctor I've seen -  
     holding my arm  
     holding a thin black film  
     holding my resilience -  
 told me so.

*Post-Traumatic Radioulnar Synostosis*

*Postrum Attic Radio Ol Noir Sins Oh Toes Is*

*Postrunatifraydeehullnoirsinnotohsis*

Embedded deep  
 please repeat, Doctor  
 I forget the title.  
 I'll repeat it nightly.  
 wash thrice daily.  
 is this the name  
 for the spot of skin on my thumb that never gets cold?  
 one more time, slowly please –  
 I'm writing a nametag.

Before (2009): outside a house with my aunt in June  
 after eating chocolate eggs with flecks of foil still stuck to the sides  
 I'll trip backwards, stumble  
     my wrist, slipping

    into empty air. The simile:  
     a kite, bright red and yellow  
     strings tight, a low altitude flight  
     a safe Icarus,  
     tumbled with me – broke completely  
     ah - not enough wind,  
     what a way to end.

Later (2016): A funny anecdote. Good for ice breakers. Roll snare. Laughter.

Now (2009): My mind rushes forward tripping over the step,

giggles forward into boxes of Lego and Jenga blocks  
 giddy with toes swimming in foam puzzle piece carpet  
 howling and not sure what to do with hands -

I frolic.

Toys tumble between fingers, knees, and toes  
 matchbox cars crash and scrape,  
 the stuffed dogbear winks as he's thrown up and down the steps  
 Lego men lose their heads and I scoop their frailty, breathe them back together  
     place them in cars  
     tuck them onto bed  
     close their closet door

pull the door shut

even imaginary, my fingernails brush the cold metal

*no twist*

my breath comes out dry

and cold,

toy cars burn, ruined

I hear sirens and choked sobs behind gloved hands

stiff arms

the dogbear lies crumpled like a broken doll

lifeless with death wringing its hands around the cracked neck

Lego men die without funeral

no heads.

I pull my hand away

take it back into my pocket

shift the plastic strap around my neck

scratch my rib that never has an itch.

The simile: A door robbed of the security of not-yet-broken wood.

When I step forward  
Later,  
the strap pulling down my neck  
is gone,  
I stop pointing  
to the left,  
the doorknob is glowing:  
I clean up my mess.

Tea Leaves on Open Casket

I realized I was only  
 drinking  
     hot liquids,  
 and coming close  
     to crying at the cold  
         water in the sink  
     I used to splash  
         my cheeks.

I sip slowly apart from harsh mornings  
     of black socks,  
 grey heads with slick hair  
     titled down kind  
 as a brochure  
     pressing a perfect whisper  
         on my ears:  
     “blood pooled (a little) out of her mouth”  
                                     “we cleaned it up”  
             “she’s there now (see her?) she looks”  
             “                                    beautiful”

“take your time”  
     the decay is paused,  
                             blood has already pooled  
                             napkin wiped and  
             tucked into pockets  
                             two hours  
                             spent rubbing old woman’s knuckles  
   kissing mothball skin  
             tasting pooled blood,  
 wondering  
 “do you want these earrings?”

“this *gold*”  
                             no  
                             thank you  
                                     give me the ring, please

“I’ll give you your time”  
 “            then            cut at the knuckle”  
                             “slip it in your pocket later”  
                             gentle  
                             intimate  
             but I won’t wipe            after  
 with a napkin

why would I?

Cry now, loudly  
     move your chest quickly  
                                     you should see spots  
                     have a dry mouth  
   cracked corner lips  
     think about dying  
                     get as close as possible,  
             imagine the belt  
                             feel cold metal bite your throat  
                             imagine  
   fantasize  
 don't take this too far -  
     cry  
                     pound your chest  
                             pull your son down  
                             when you try to jump  
                     onto the coffin-  
     scream with torn eyelids  
                             but don't touch her face  
                                     don't break surface tension  
                     like torn egg yolk  
                             dry blood might thickly slip  
                     wait until lids are shut  
                     then  
                             from a bloodless cheek,  
 cut off the fingers  
                             cup the chin  
             lip to lip  
                     kiss it goodbye  
 your last moment  
                     skin tone powder thick,  
                     your last memory  
     with a corpse.  
                             remembered as gray skin  
                             perfumed

my lip

craves warm touch

tasteless

without lipstick.

I sip myself away

from the feeling of weight

sliding and landing up steps

a tilted coffin

suddenly heavier on one side;

I wonder if old blood puddles

on velvet

from an open mouth

in small pools

or is dried already

stained

on her blue blouse.

weak hands gripped metal firmly

rubbed knuckles gently

lift a mug slowly

to chapped gums

to wash hotly and sweetly down

the powder

taste of a carcass coated

in sifted flour.



A Pinch of Salt

Sometimes I spend minutes  
balancing the tip of my finger on my thumb  
until only their shapes overlap;  
I feel a thinner air.

I hold a space of immeasurable quantities,  
an openness to the flavor of water,  
an emptiness revealing a pinch  
of a delicate relish.

Thank you, mother,  
for being so vaguely defined.  
yes - I can taste it now.