

Cinders

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“All water has a perfect memory  
and is forever trying to get back  
to where it was”

-Toni Morrison

I.

## **Ancestry**

The old men I know  
are obsessed with hands,  
callouses screeched  
around their knuckles like tinfoil  
challenging you to bite back

make like hyena, anteater, black bear  
body script filled for a fighting chance.  
Consumed, lavishing the violet haze  
of tainted spliffs and Prince,

their eyes — dead ringer  
assassins tying chains  
like boy scouts — trained  
against the ceiling fan,

pulsing alarm clock  
over nothing. But they clamor,  
cannibalistic drawls  
begging for reverence

as if old leather was worth wearing  
for its wisdom.

Remember the amber summers,  
remember gripping into skin  
like toilet paper, reaching for absolution  
between brown bottles and empty rollers,

foolhardy and violent, blissless bodies  
thrashing and caged.  
Burning oak trees,

stubborn and sutured forestry,

crushing bark into your hollowed stumps,  
and growing boys from the ashes.

## **To the abandoned boy in the park**

Take my hand,  
if you can  
dance these passages  
with whatever you name scripture,  
three and a half steps  
and two beats under tempo  
careful not to paraphrase  
melody into philosophy.

Pass through these streets  
without taking,  
pass with me  
under the humdrum  
and undone suns  
leaving bodies baking  
and today taking  
more of us  
than either of us  
were ready for.

Play along  
to the accordions  
in accordance  
with the harps  
and sonata  
dripping discord,

revel in the harpsichord,  
in the future tense,  
in the presence of the present,  
and pass along  
the half breathed  
half breaths



and breathe,  
breathe

and breathe now.

Breathe  
and go.

## **December**

Turgid  
sheep skin  
raked,  
scarred,  
bloody  
streaks  
of  
efflorescence,  
methanol  
and  
oreo dust.

**“The Child is father of the Man”**

*-William Wordsworth and  
The Beach Boys*

And every boy is a son  
washing his hands  
of dirty parnassus

picked in the outfields  
of the discolored playground.

He is scolded by his father,  
who begs to be called papa,  
not to go back there,

there are strangers who will hurt you.

And as the man  
pulls the boy from his chest,  
a starving lung,

the ribbed son,  
blistering and parched

traces the wildflowers  
between the peeling green fence,

leaving streaks on the window  
and a stranger in the reflection.

**Ever since you were little**

you woke up blurry  
elbows chafed  
from rubbing against your window

as if  
even while you slept  
your body was trying to leave you.

## **My Father's Whistle**

I had stopped to stare at a fortune teller  
an animatronic in post mysticist regalia  
who promised me a pair of wings

and when I looked back you were gone  
lost to the sight of denim and sundresses,  
the smell of fried starch, licorice, tinfoil,

then I heard you, like a thin dowel  
sailing through the perspiring clamor  
a call to come back home

## **Transcendental**

Let me play amongst the stars  
in a two step, ball chain  
prison-swing melody  
by a man who looks like Tom Hanks  
in heavy mascara  
sensitive and oily,  
tearing his crushed velvet dress  
on shattered pottery  
as chandeliers fall around him.

## **Papa**

You,  
a wet heaviness  
over my knees. I bring  
a hand across your back.

Gentle enough to keep  
the distance between us,  
but firm enough  
to hold your head below mine.

There is no levity  
in this ritual, only a guilty  
indignity and the prickling  
of your beard.

In the thickness of the dark  
I am drowning,  
pressed into the corners  
to make space  
for your desperation.

And you are on your knees  
crying,

but I will not

let you take these rasping breaths from me,  
as you have before.

But I will hold you,  
so that you know  
I am different.

**I can hear the afternoon sirens**

while consuming a bag  
of potato and onion empanadas  
outside the pier building

*I just stepped outside*

wrapped in cashmere  
I watch the ferries go by

*the busses are running again*

do you remember  
losing our kites at the reservoir  
then chasing them down  
through the city like fireflies

*but I missed my stop*

I'm afraid of the ocean  
it's something about the quiet  
of being underwater

*don't wait up for me*

the fog has settled over the tide  
and the street lamps have turned on  
but I can still barely make out  
an ashing cinder  
as it meets the waves

*I'm going to be late*



II.

## He Dies

in the third degree  
fingers clutching the ends  
of a photo, tattooed  
with his sons birth.

of his own vices  
liver choking  
on half spoken  
cans of tuna  
and burnt  
declarations.

by a hundred hands  
with no respect  
for his privacy  
mourning  
an empty chair  
and  
a fractured  
coffee table.

cheaply, empty.

because it is easy.  
because there is no labor in death.

and the long road is awkward and splintered,  
we are left to walk the miles he found emasculating  
until we are nothing but pyres  
eager to burn his shadow into the asphalt.

## **My dear**

You arrive to me  
like a bleeding atomic  
ratcheted against my shoulderblade  
forevermore  
a bolt lain flower bed  
we lock ourselves over  
dripping barbed live wire  
like ecstasy  
struggling not to consume

## Vignette

<i>part 1</i>	<i>part 1.5</i>	<i>part 2</i>	<i>part 3</i>	<i>part 4</i>	<i>part 5</i>
little sail boat pixel distance shore bound to memory	we sat on the cliffside more times than i care to forget	i hear you on my left  storyteller drill sergeant old sage sing to me	young child does not know normal learns what home feels like many years later	yours is the first smell i remember  the next two don't come for many years	big nose is what you called me and your own  cratered face scarred
forgetting seas flipped consonants		vibrations			ashed elbows
		shoes dug into carpet	to possess his own body	the first scent i dug my head into	bad knees
dock mind to land hand to skin remember heat drifting into you		fading behind	to embrace without fear he longs for his mother	laid in savored	gnarl root knuckles stone skin etched deep
		me is everything	for silence from the buzzing walls	learned that from you	mangled legs oily hair painted skin
in autumn fall		there is no right way to remember		love forgot it picked back up later	turtle wolf bear your body zookeeper
				smelled much different	past woven to heart
					i stitch myself back together

<i>part 6</i>	<i>part 7</i>	<i>part 8</i>	<i>part 8.5</i>	<i>part 9</i>	<i>part 10</i>
he	pathetic	heart	smaller	I hide	You
never left	syllable	aches		warmth	are not there
bruises			you	from myself	
made sure	acronym	remnants			behind the
not to	shortened	called body	collapsed	there is no	door
				lesson	
struck quiet	moment	roaring	cliffside	to take	or on the
enough	weakness	sirens			couch
to only be			me	comfort in	
heard	forgetful	fade			or waiting
downstairs	for		falling		in the
	granted	rushing			stairwell
she	granite	streetlights	roaring		
screams	grinded				or between
kill him then	dust	ventriloquist	contrition		the
he screams	you	voices			ghost flickers
fine			regret		of
	old	should've			streetlights
kills		pushed	failure		
the way	sick	harder			as we roar
he knows			heart		down the
how	tired	doors			intersection
		burst	aches		
silently	me	empty			I take care
in violence		shell			to look left
in kind					
		smells			my eyes
the guilt		different			mouthng
roars back					the only
		boat fades			apologies
		far from			I have left
		normal			

## Roadkill

Fuck the cockatrice  
back woodded  
cocker spaniel  
splayed out on the sidewalk  
sunburnt and bird shit  
sticking like ashes  
to a cigar tray,  
the healed over memory  
picked and pus filled.

## **God asks the oceans who they are**

I let my eyes close  
and the world calls for me

A pearlescent beach  
an amethyst moon  
the chirping undergrowth  
the splashing heartbeats of an island

I let them sing to me  
the twilight sirens  
I give myself  
to their nebulous touch  
and as I sink into  
the blackened blue

it fades

There is no cold  
no silent assimilation  
into the depths  
The rushing passages  
refuse me  
I am motionless  
silt amongst the mountains

There is no absolution  
to unearth here  
Only my reflection  
atop the water

### III.



## **My brother and I**

are good at being quiet.  
by the time we moved out

with our mother, we had forgotten  
that this silence was ours

to take. We have lived  
under the same father,

borrowed the same warmth,  
in the same awkwardness,  
of another family's home.

I know that he knows  
how it feels to be strange  
and quiet,

ear pressed against a locked door,  
sharing melancholy in smiles  
as our lives crumble around us.

## **Summer in Forest Grove, OR**

With my back against  
the uncut headboard  
we pinched together  
on the hottest day of the year,

I smell morning, dense and alive  
feathered trees and fading aeroplanes.

Later that afternoon,  
laid out in the perspiration  
knees kissing your kitchen tile,  
a streak of grease down my forearm  
as I split screws from our one box fan

you dance towards me, laughing  
with the sort of sunkissed happiness  
that begs to be shared. I meet you

palms open for the taking,  
and we turn to the promise  
of forevermore careless  
of the fading season.

## Two Step

Let's paint the world in sepia tonight, dug up from the dirt  
of bare knuckle boxing matches. Pull your fists from the  
mud red sand and let them drag along the pavement.

Color these sidewalks in chalk lined afterburn leaving  
scorch marks where the telephone poles once shone  
like night lights to dye the foggy afternoons tangerine.

Scrape your brethren from their carpet fibers, gather them  
in dust pans and watch them fly like grappling pirate hooks  
latching onto the next morning breeze. I breathe with them,

the two stepping March men, hands tangled like undergrowth.  
We bloodlet the daisies to paint the sky, bring with us  
the changing of seasons, cycle of rebirth, the felling of tyrants.

Without penchant for the day cycle, rise and grow out of autumn  
leaves reflected in rain puddles burning forests in the wake of summer.  
Feel the heat against your back as you watch its shadow fall in front of you.

## **On Love**

We cannot  
tell  
stories  
of the  
battles  
we are  
still  
fighting.

## **And still**

My father says to me  
in post humous grace  
jaw clenching two cigarettes sideways  
that my brother eyes fall back into a smile  
while mine tend to pinch forward

I only catch the trails of sawdust he kicks up on the way out

Gathering myself from his toolbox  
we briskly broom the mess into the dust pan  
on the same hands and knees my grandfather knelt over  
cutting my thumb on its serrated lip as I return it to the garage wall

The mouse greets me at the door  
silver pellet still half an inch into where my father left it  
he hands me the courage I couldn't take then  
and offers me a bowl of gazpacho in the kitchen

I lose my way and find myself deep in the couch cushions  
arms crossing my body over and over as I look both ways  
and when neither turns a result I call down the stairs  
my grandmother screams back at my father, kill him then

let him die let him die let him die let him die let him die  
let him die let him die let him die let him die let him die  
let him die let him die let him die let him die let him die

## Hail

You ragged, ugly  
crash landing—a miracle

you stood, ruptured spine in hand,  
nails splitting at my clavicle,

to remind me  
*I am not yours*

you never were.  
But this would not be the first time

we have waited over open caskets,  
or that you would have found me

tongue coated in pencil shavings,  
crawling out of the bathroom, stomach

soaked in rubbing alcohol. What is it  
you see slipped under my fingernails

chipped like your left molar,  
do these scars remind you of home?

Sometimes, in the puffs of cinnabar  
cigars smoked bedside, that is dusk,

I catch you drifting. Murky baubles  
staring straight through me,

a shallow cage  
with good acoustics

both of us wailing  
swearing, kneeling

praying, hands flirting  
over the tear of a single lighter:

*Holy Queen*  
*mother of mercy*

*To thee we cry*  
*poor banished children of Eve*

*Pray for us*

**My dear,**

I have misplaced you among the shatters and clank of dutch oven lids against baby blue cast irons hanging from the sagging rotted pegboard in that old kitchen. You lie next to me, velvet whispers tied into streamers hanging above the dalmatian speckled tile that feels like gravel against our backs. Do you remember that night we walked in bare footed, half-lunged and wide awake, to the hush of a thousand wings and darting eyes clinging to the rooftop. The memory of their shadows is still imprinted onto the ceiling light.

You are a wanderer, splint leg made walking cane, peddler of cautionary tales and makeshift moonlight seances. To be with you is unstable, you shake like the river below the pipe bridge I was once told me not to jump on. *This place means something to some people.* I once longed to meet *some people*, not over breaking bridges, but to beg over anything besides pews waiting to be knelt on, to be anything but a waiting body desperately searching for something to make space for.

Yet, I have claimed this land without you. I have forced my refuge through clenched teeth and shredded skin, lips bursting like moths in early June. You are not the only thing dying in the first heat of summer. There is no need to search between the reams of paper on my father's desk, nor the bottom of the oil lamps he left behind, I've made char of them and buried the ashes under the blue oak.

So now my dear sanity, rest peacefully, without need for the hum of car engines to lull you past the night terrors, without fear of calloused hands and knuckled grips, without a need to know the difference. Ride down the sidewalk, weaving your baby blue schwinn underneath driveways and in between fence posts. You no longer need to cry into paint cans, metal splinters in your knees. Keep your head high and place your hands where you can hold them easily.

Yellow eye, watch me, burn these irises between your retinas and dream of my body wrapped in satin when you lay down to sleep.

Forever,

Yours



## **old shirt full of holes**

It still smells like you  
the same aroma that haunts your closet  
mom refuses to clean out  
afraid of losing  
the last part of you still in this home  
your body still lingers in It,  
It has traced the bends of your frame  
plastered them into It's memory  
in a way we can only wish to remember you  
when i don It like a costume  
they still tell me i look exactly like you  
but i see every difference  
the way It's folds do not fit on me like they did you  
the shape of my nose, the length of my hair  
the glasses i have changed,  
the ink i have dug into my skin  
in memory of you, but also in rebellion  
i see the difference  
in the way people look at me  
as they once did you  
in the sadness of their eyes  
when they realize  
It is only me  
because you are long gone

I want to be kn  
own by  
my name

## Homestead

There is pride in bareness,  
not always for the painting  
of your legs against the wind  
but for the decision to smear them against the canvas  
unrestrained. I watch the sycamore tree

hiding the childish earth  
beneath its skirt. I want to be a mother  
sometimes more than I want to be a woman  
or alive. To live and love absolutely

is to be angelic, to cradle survival  
regardless of its weight. I wish to be sturdy.  
Perhaps I dream too easily,

a meal does not always deserve  
an apology. My hands only know  
how to continue moving. But feeding  
a closed mouth is just another way  
to walk out the door.  
I will try to do more.

## **Little Boy**

My roommate  
brought home a kitten.  
A ratty, long eared  
dash of mischief  
not 2 months old.

He plays with wires  
and still latches  
his jaws onto my fingers

when we play. But when he lays  
his head against my arm  
I am hesitant.

Is it okay to love you,  
to find happiness  
in your joy,

or am I taking from which  
I was not invited to?

When I cradle you  
between the palms  
of my hands

I mean to say,  
please  
do not be afraid,  
you can pull away if you'd like.

I hope you do not see me  
as I saw him.  
I do not want to leave  
another lonely boy in this world.