

[illegible]



A cat regrets  
the absence of vermin.  
Enjoy these storms  
between light.

## Hands

My grandmother's hands are dotted with light mauve spots. I once thought they were simply beautiful henna scars that only angels who endure the pain to provide are blessed with. Her hands are unfeeling like steel. She flips pastries swimming in scalding fry oil with her fingertips, for she learned without tools, swallowed lifetimes of pain, and now is this.

Her hands are soft though, so gentle that they hold onto a piece of bread, as if it would melt like cream with any more force. With gold bangles, rolled-up wrists, and gravity brought on by folding skin, her hands flexibly curl in half. She knows that beauty's sister is pain and was taught that at a young age from above.

Her hands stretch the dough and smack it onto cold granite countertop: a sticky slavery surface that knows a thousand slaps. She raised the children on her own because it was her place. But she really knew her son and daughter. They lived in her hands, in the lines of her palm. The three of them ate together quietly under one solitary kernel of light, unheard over peeling wallpaper, train shivers, and elevator dings.

Her hands roll and fold again and again like a machine covered in dry white semolina powder. She gave me everything in mouthfuls. She knew the perfect ratio, the perfect bite of her creations. I gobbled up a lifetime of art without understanding what I was doing. She always climbs the stairs to thank God, and one day, I will forget the way her hands fold to offer prayers. She justified all of her misfortune, trusts in Him that everything will be okay.

Her hands I watch here on the dining table with numbed appreciation. Thousands of miles away from home, she still remains so intent in the folds. She quietly dips fingers in the water and her eyes gasp to life. Her mouth uncontrollably mumbles all of her thoughts so softly that I will never hear them. She only looks at me when the dough wakes in the bubbling oil. She smiles at me until I grow old and leave. She smiles at me until she grows old and porous, with nothing to give but a pile of flattened bread.

## The Smells of God Remind Me of Death and Guilt

It's sad to think about loneliness.  
It's not because I'm lonely, it's because she must be, her husband must be.  
It's absurd that I just called her husband, *her husband*.  
He's my grandpa.  
I call him Nana, and he lives

In a chocolate and rose oil room.  
He isn't stuck, he can walk out whenever.  
When I hear his footsteps above, I frantically gather my things.  
Talking to him is like swallowing gum.  
And to this occasionally he says,

*The immortal go about their lives omitting me.*  
He puts his things all around the house.  
His Qur'an and masala sleep in on the family room couch,  
Waiting for morning namaaz  
Next to an often-tipped-over picture frame of his resting son.

His philosophy books decay and digress in the living room for  
Evening reading, evening dialogue with dead humans.  
*Because the immortal go about their lives omitting me*, he says.  
I've always wondered how wisdom could weave into his follicles.  
His hair won't fall by the grace of God.

*It's time you learn Arabic*, he says  
*There's so much you don't understand.*  
On my lunar birthday, he gives me \$100 and  
Rubber bands the bill to a poem he has written.  
I have dozens of them shoved into my desk drawer.

I give Nana my extra pens and notebooks from school.  
He loves paper and revels in ritual destruction, neatly  
Cleaves pages of qur'anic text from the bindings.  
He hides them around the house, and  
I often find them folded up in my backpack.

I can't hear his footsteps anymore. I can only hear the doors.  
My mother told me that the immortal should omit ghosts of weak men.  
*History leaves behind deadbeat dads*, she told me when I was young.  
Before another night, Nana stirs a spoon of strawberry syrup in his cold milk.  
He drinks it alone on the kitchen table. The sugar won't kill him.

An ordinary eternity,  
He doesn't call my house home.

## **Kayak**

He was becoming  
before I became.  
I am named the one who brings people together  
because he did.

He asked them to love him,  
and they did.  
They gave him everything in  
mouthfuls, in tiffins loaded with potatoes and okra.

They were intoxicated in his cologne,  
his argyle sweater, his fitted khakis.  
They rushed to TJ Maxx choked by their saris,  
prayed in smoke and incense to atone for their desires.

But when he left,  
they remained.

They said I have his face.  
It was my identical lip curl.  
They name me the one who brings people together  
because he did.

They pull me near,  
pat on their knees with jingling bangles,  
press my neck to guide my head onto their thighs.  
I close my eyes, and they run their fingers through my hair.

I like okra,  
so they load the fingers in tiffins.  
They tower them on the kitchen island and  
feed me everything in mouthfuls.

I ask them to love me,  
and they do.

But when I look in the mirror, I think  
he'll reach right through and wrap his fingers around my throat.  
He'll wear my skin, my hands, and my face.  
He'll open the tiffins and finger scoop the food into his mouth.

I know he is starving and cold.  
I know he wants to sleep in my bed.

I know he watched me when the water filled his lungs.

## Cake

My mom's friend tried to contain the fact that  
Metaphorically she got caked in the face.  
The frosting tasted like  
Lemon-juice, banana peels, and fingernails.  
She was so batshit crazy that  
Her societal standing relied on sitting down or standing up.

She was a blue orchid playing first-chair-cello in the front row.  
Her body swayed expressively.  
Her wrist bent extensively.  
Her blazer shined exquisitely.  
Her anger was confetti, it only glittered elegantly  
When she was guided pleadingly to second-chair.  
She didn't work hard, but we all agreed that  
She deserved and expected.

The warmth of her belly was the same as any other woman's.  
She prided her top two abs from daily yoga mat crunches.  
After work, her husband loved to lay with his cheek on her body.  
His breath was too hot, she thought.  
She shifted uncomfortably most nights.

She filled each of her vases with memory.  
Every day she replaced and  
Rearranged the room's viscera.  
At night, she would bite her pills in two.  
It was time to ween off.  
She was scared to buy a pill cutter.  
*Absolutely no separation*, she would tell herself.

She just couldn't help it.  
She was convinced the blood was rushing to the top of her skull.  
The doctor kept telling her that she was imagining it.  
She herself was a doctor.  
But all the family friends sustained the thief,  
The thin-blooded attention grabber. On  
Sweet Sixteens,  
Anniversaries,  
Get-Togethers, she got herself together until

Mathematically it was improbable for her to sit still.  
Each fresh gauge sapped until she physically fell.  
*Blood rush*, she would say.  
And we would converge as toothy cannibals  
To lift her delicious body, until our disgust was wet and wiry.

My mom's friend tried to contain the fact that  
Metaphorically she got caked in the face.  
After this last time that she pretended to die or whatever,  
Everyone puked her out,  
White frosting,  
Sweet bread,  
Strawberries in all.

She kept dipping her skull in the candy-cane swirls.

After that, she tore away,  
Carrying a vial of it in her pocket.  
We haven't heard from her in a long time.  
She's off looking for something real.  
I like thinking that she still looks at the vial.  
If we didn't throw away her cake maybe  
We'd see her around more.

## **When I die, you'll take up at least 1/80<sup>th</sup> of my life flashing before my eyes**

I bequeathed you my brain at breakfast.  
It wobbled like three perfect egg yolks when  
The plate slid across the granite.  
Every word you said, my inner stupid shouted,  
“Eyes up, I’m interested!”

I asked you out for lunch right after, and you said, “No!”  
Unless I made you lunch myself, but  
Who makes lunch on a first date?  
How could I kiss you after?

In my head, I planned way too far ahead.  
A prescience impelled me to whip up my dragon noodles.  
It’s the only thing I can make,  
But I’ll learn how to make other things.  
I’ll literally do anything.

I fell in love with you at dinner  
Right after my mom told me she hates you.  
“It’s not that she’s ugly or stupid,” Mom told me.  
“These people are not like us.”

It took lightyears for the light to reach your face, and  
I waited the whole time,  
Hoping that it wouldn’t melt you.  
You looked at me like you did after I put your bike together.

“Poems have to do something, right?” you said.  
“Otherwise, why the fuck are you writing them?”  
“Poems need to raise your voice.”  
“You’re so quiet all the time.”

Your body moved like no other.  
It was like having sex with a dead fish.  
I couldn’t really see straight anymore because  
You wouldn’t look at me.

And with that the light had to turn off.  
Even though I waited the whole time, hoping that it wouldn’t melt you.  
You would turn around and shuffle to the edges of the mattress.  
Sometimes, you moved so slowly that you  
convinced even yourself that I wouldn’t notice.

It started in the library, much earlier than I had imagined.  
Page 20 under my finger was screaming.  
Maybe it was pissed that I was reading it?  
Immediately, I felt like I couldn’t understand anything.  
I thought I was having a stroke. Everything smelled like

Fossilized hot chocolate and wilting, unwashed raspberries,  
Cold hair, jolly ranchers, and warm Crayola crayons melted into seatbelt holders,  
Spicy diced okra, two fresh roti’s, and  
At least an 80th of my life I’m never getting back.



## Everything

I feel the odd feeling  
of having headphones on,  
while the music in the club is  
coming alive.

I am everything.

I am celery with cilantro and other herbs.  
I am water-bobbing litter and  
leftovers wrapped heinously in saran wrap.  
I am the stretch mark scars that you hide from your new lover.  
I am the last stick you feed to a fire meant for burning skin,  
yet I am a misfit. I eat the flames.

I thought that I would come together, but  
I didn't.

I am a coke can in your 20-degree refrigerator,  
Celsius not Fahrenheit.  
I'm doing the opposite of freezing.  
I am that first underwhelming sip you take.  
Well you said you wanted coke, and I am the coke, so  
we'll just say I "whelm" you.

Sure, I can be something else now.  
I can be the salt lamp you keep on your dresser  
that you lick to show all your friends  
it's a real chunk of Himalayan salt.

I can be the freeze-dried strawberries  
that you eat even though you cough.  
I used to tell you that the fruity dust would always  
get trapped in your throat.

I have gone from place to place, but  
I always find myself by you  
even though you don't see me.

I spin around in a tornados and hurricanes  
in tidal waves, in a centrifuge.  
I collide with the particles I seek to part with.

Maybe I will feel more whole if I am nothing, so  
I beg you to take me apart.  
Sign me the fuck up  
to be nothing,  
no one.

## Livid

Fiery forest,  
take me away from this moment and all after.  
Woozily wander me towards your light. Pierce my  
bones with autumn air.

Writhe my ant legs inside you.  
And when I swallow you in one big gulp,  
detonate my stomach.  
Slather my skin with napalm.  
Ignite me to step foot in front of foot back inside you.

October forest,  
take me forward through your infinity.  
Take me toward the black heron roosted on fragile legs  
Tear two glossy jet marbles out of its head.

Drip syrup onto my sticky fingers and  
strike me to my knees on the icy sand.  
Your eyeless heron stares up at me,  
weeping sweet obsidian blood  
until it flies away.

Concrete forest,  
you placed me on your empty road,  
driving,  
subsuming the median like  
a livid snake eating its own shredded skin.

Your smooth paved road  
is a still black pool that I dive in,  
holding my breath and clamping my nose.  
When I open my eyes,  
I don't breathe.  
I swim toward the stars underneath me.

My mother sees me lying on the road.  
I'm naked and shivering.  
She wraps a black shawl around my shape,  
fusing me with the night.

I am a floating head.

## Tumult

A walk from library to library is nothing without a quadrangle where  
cobble stone bends into uneven steps.  
I can't lose my footing because  
I *know* all of these people.

I know their lips and their wrinkles.  
They've told me their fears,  
and they've told me I'm in their dreams in convoluted mishmashes.  
I know all of these people.

I'm rooting for you!  
I hope you have a great  
day! Good luck on your physics midterm!  
Good luck on your date with him tonight!  
I have a gut feeling this one won't disappoint you!

The people I see, they're more important than the stones,  
but they're frozen in time here:

Paper angels  
we used to cut out  
when we were children.  
I can't see them anymore  
just the space where  
world touches white paper.  
Eventually, they'll  
disappear completely.

When I'm head spinning in class, dreading  
language that could and would become  
I am always left wondering what can  
twist and weave tapestries much more beautiful  
than things are.

After eons of everyday  
pissing on carpets,  
eating spinach and feta pizza on the summer grass,  
smoking on forbidden rooftops, and  
running along the illimitable lake,

*hi*

would be weird.  
The space heavies and waits  
even after we're both gone.