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COME.
A POETRY MANUSCRIPT

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

VIRGINIA HENRY

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

This is a poetry collection divided into two parts. “North Street” is a sequence of poems that investigates the intersection of solitude and fear. “The Tinder Poems or Encounters of Another Kind” is a sequence that uses sexual experiences as a catalyst to explore the collision of power, love, and cultural expectation.

DEDICATION

For

Bea, Connie, Ray, Vera, Junie, Mae & Jo

May you know truth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks, first, to Ann Fisher-Wirth who read these poems individually and together and who has been a constant voice of encouragement and wisdom in my ear.

Thanks too, to Derrick Harriell and Jay Watson, who sat on my committee and shared both their brilliance and their time. To Cristi Ellis, thanks for the inspiration and opportunity to get this project rolling. Personal thanks to Molly Brown for reading these poems with a razor sharp eye and the gentlest heart.

It is an honor to be my mother's daughter and a pride to call Harold home. My parents' support is a gift for which I wish to show ceaseless gratitude. Thank you.

PREFACE

I choose to love this time for once
with all my intelligence

Adrienne Rich

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Hook

That's a thing men do, use my name. They'll say, *Hello, V!* or *Thanks for coming, Virginia*. And it sounds like flesh beneath a nail, plumb and tender. How long has it been since you pinched a leaf between finger and thumb, that spotted paper in your hand? Do you recall the way it clings, hangs to ribs when the body is shorn? A burned down tree, you think it is gone. But there are roots, and there is ash. Crows still exist. Last night, I dreamed a whole house ablaze. You in the center, calling to me. Listen. I hold you in my hips, but will stretch you thin as smoke. If you can't touch me, I am afraid, everything will blow away.

North Street

*One need not be a Chamber —— to be Haunted ——
one need not be a house ——*

Emily Dickinson

March 16th

Dear E,

T has finally left.

I'm a little girl

*at the beach. The one who just got rocked
by her first wave,*

except

this little girl,

mouth full

of sand and suit

*twisted in all the wrong places, knows
another is coming.*

But still,

I can't get up.

*I'm reading what you wrote,
and I'm crying a lot.*

Do you think this is unhealthy?

I just moved

into this new apartment—

*this attic above two apartments above
a cellar over*

*a big gaping hole in the ground. It's like living in a treehouse,
all the windows screwed*

shut and their glass covered

in branches.

It's so hot.

I can barely breathe.

Something is going on here.

*303 North Street
Apartment No. 3 : The Attic
Oxford, Mississippi*

Virginia

First Gift: A Move in Spring

I: Dawn

Early morning, before the wet settles,
I climb the stairs to Raid these attic rooms
of anyliving competing for space.

I clean everything, douse each drawer,
each cupboard with bleach.
This is my kind of animal marking.

—

This is our first moment together,
and you do not say hello.

II: Dusk

In the evening, I return to string lights,
the only thing not rags or reaper
I brought here, except for a sadness.

—

This first day, I think I own
that shadow too.

—

With bulbs hung, I sit and wait, sweat
then chill on the splitting porch
wood, watch for night to give.

—

I need to get the fear gone first:
the living alone, and the being

alone.

I must make abandon
a home
for myself.

So I drift
into the sagging dark.

—

I do not yet know
I am companied.

III: Another Dawn

In prelude to day, I wake and sweep
my face. Inside,
 despite my best efforts,
the medicine
 cabinet is full
again: fireflies,
 dead, dried, easy to crush
 into a cloth or flush away.

—

I should have blessed you for this offering,
the tenderness of the gesture ^{GIFT}.

—

How was I to know?

Unwanted Gift: A Haunt

At first it was a pipe
that broke. Gas failed, water
soured, fear came ^{FLEW} out
from the boards and brace, covered
the walls, flashed ^{STUMBLE} long fingers.

—

I swear. ^{SWEAR AGAIN.}

—

Long fingers down the walls.
Long fingers at the window.
Something began
to rumble ^{CALL} in the freezer, ripple
yellow from the tap ^{THE CLICK}.
Sound ^{BE} solid
without cause.

Now the cat won't drink from her dish,
mews for something else—
mews for something else—
mews for something else—

April 12th

Dear E,

*I met my neighbors: a wife and her husband.
She is the most beautiful woman
I have ever seen.
They live on the other side of the road.*

*We were talking about the house.
Maybe they're just kind,
but she said something happened here,
and he told her O be quiet.*

From the attic,

- V

A Maybe Gift: The Dream

It is the middle
of winter. I walk
stone to ice to cross
a stream. My feet
look like my feet,
but I sense
they are thin and sharp
as razors.
My makeshift
cobble path

—

like coat buttons
on a skipping girl

—

curves and slips.
I bridge bank
to bank. On the other
side, I find:

my firefly
friends, flitting,
bright, and a bear
disemboweled,
strung, organs
glowing
like Chinese lanterns.

Everything smells
of glebe and guts.

For you! they cry,
For you!

Gift: A Haunt

Waking, I find, not a filament
but a fly, buzzing
in the bulb overhead—

body shook dry as an electric
raisin. I think
to bathe, but instead
leave quickly with the keys.

May 21st

Dear E,

Men used to get into
my skin. Now I think
it's women who crawl
under the paper-weight of a person
and refuse
to leave,
slip into the scents of a place
and stay.

This house is like the one in the Bible, built all on ~~sound~~^{SAND}.

I'm not trying to make a metaphor here. Tornado season is actually coming.

From the attic,

- V

Gift: Like a Fist

One afternoon, I return to find a wasps' nest wound
in a corner of my bedroom window, its tiny
perfect compartments, each a hallway in the same house.

You have spun origami with the anger of moving parts.

—

Players stacking hands, one on one on one on one on one,
until the whole huddle buzzes with sweat and aggression.

—

For a few days, I hear the copper

bodies tapping

against the panes

like someone at the door

wanting out,

until it stops.

Gift: Haunt

Gangs of men
with screws
and hammers
are coming
to fix
all the things
you broke.

I'm expecting them,
but what you send,
is something else.

The *taptap* and scratch,
the roof creature whine

makes me jump and jig
in my sleep
shirt
and panties.

Who are you?
I'm calling
with my head
tilted back.
What's up there?

—

I'm a madwoman
waiting
open-mouthed
and crank-necked
for rain,
wandering the desert.
I'm alone and looking
for something falling
from the sky.
And there is nothing
coming for me.

—

Then the bedlam

moves to another room,
and I'm running,
tripping, popping
a dime of red
into my knee.

—

My paws on the den rug,
my animal bearing, down
and waiting to pounce.

—

Then the door starts.
The men,

here.

—

Hide. ^{HIDE!}

I think for us both,
remember
you're not here. ^{WHO?}

—

The sounds
suspiciously silent
as I pad over
to the kitchen knob,

the boy
from downstairs
asking,

everything ok?

looking past my shoulders,
not looking
too fast
past
my knees.

June 8th

Dear E,

*T used to call me by another name,
called me Ginny.*

I'm not going to use that name anymore, ok?

But he's not why.

*I said.
T's not why.*

He's still gone.

Wouldn't you write back?

From the attic,

- V

A Jealous Gift

Every time my landlord
sends the plumber,

it runs just fine.

And I'm mad
at you,

your little
potty humor.
Sick
of your jokes.

You, who
I can only assume

hates men,
keep bringing them
to my ^{OUR} door,

mocking this human
body I have, my attempts
to hide, my attempts
to hide it.

Gift: There, There.

At night,
I've fumbled
my way to the toilet,
figured the walls,
oriented
to the patterns
of this new
familiar.

And I'm
sure
of it
now.

—

The inhabited dark:
a ripple in the ether.

—

From my tree-house
heights, I can see

into the abandoned
house next door.

No one, I know,
lives
there.

But my certain
vacancy
is interrupted.

—

A light. ^{ALIGHT.}

—

As if a woman sat
writing something

unchaste,
learning

the privacy of paper:
it's acceptance,
it's echo of all
her secret
airs.

—

Question:

Where do you go
when you're gone?

—

Don't trick me.

There's nobody there.
At least, there's no
body there.

July 2nd

Dear E,

A tornado came.
The sky greened.
I was afraid.

I was more afraid
than the other people who've lived
here all their lives.

A body cut open—the clouds.

I thought about crawling
into the hole
beneath this house.

But I went to the bar,
and they let me bring my cat.

There, I told a girl about the things that happen
here. She is
my new friend. We met at the bar.

She says I'm not crazy.

She says she had a sister once.
She says she has a sister
still.

From the attic,

- V

Runaway Gift

That beautiful neighbor woman, red-eyed
and promising the moon for a clue.

I was outside, walking
passed the cellar flap. I heard
a voice
 so like my own:
that trapped animal kind of asking.

So, the downstairs boy came running,
crawled like a hero into the dark.

I called the number. I said, *I think*,
I said, *I found him*, holding that wild-
haired barking to my breast.

This gift of a saving, to do something right,
not from you, never from you.

But still.

It's haunting,

all those flyers around town, like some child
had gone missing.

A Glossary of Terms: Unrecoverable Deletions

As adapted from the Emily Dickinson Lexicon—a dictionary of over 9,275 words and variants found in Dickinson's poems—which uses the poems, the Webster 1844 dictionary, and the Oxford English Dictionary to create the entries.

GIFT

gift [-s] *n* : OE.

1. ___ sent; thing _____ .
2. _____; ___ fits; _____.

HAUNT

haunt [-ed, -ing, -s] *v* : Fr. *hanter*, origin uncertain.

1. _____; _____; intrude ___.
2. Instill fear ___; _____ to.

haunt [-ed] *verbal adj* : see haunt, *v*.

1. _____; _____; visited ___ _____.

haunt [-s] *n* : see haunt, *v*.

1. _____ residence; _____.
2. Habits; _____.

haunt [-ological] *n* : see haunt, *v*. (via. *M. NourbeSe Philip*)

1. a work of haunting, a wake of sorts, where the specters of the undead make themselves present.

HOME

home *adv* : see home, *n*.

1. _____; beyond mortality; ___ _____; toward immortality; ___ ___ ___
___ presence of ___.

home [-s] *n* : OE *hám* < Germanic.

1. Nest; _____; _____.
2. _____; comfort _____; _____; _____.
3. _____; _____; love_ _'_'; _love_ _____.
4. _____; _____; _____; presence of _____.
5. Mortal _____; life _____.
6. Phrase. "At home": _____; confident; _____ able; _____; _____.
7. Phrase. "At home": available; able to _____ guests.
8. Phrase. "At home": alive; living; not dead; _____ deceased.

August 19th

Dear E,

*What happened here is that a girl everyone knew
killed herself in the bathroom.*

From the attic,

- V

Gift: Maybe it was God.

You know that I'm sad,
and perhaps this is why
things are no worse for me.

I found myself on the floor
beside the toilet,
and everything about me
felt dry, so dry ^{THIRST}
at first, I was afraid

I might catch flame,
a burning bush,
but I was wet too.

I don't know
from what. ^{FROM WHAT?}

I found myself on the floor
holding something white.

It must have been a
toothbrush. ^{RIGHT.}

I was scared,
and I couldn't help thinking

about my mother
back home
in Tennessee
eating yogurt,
because it was morning

there too.
I was ashamed.

I don't know
from what.

There was something
^{LIGHT} on my wrist,
and I was afraid

of the toothbrush

or the candle or the pen
or whatever it was
and of my mother,
alone eating yogurt,

and I wasn't sure
if you were still here. ^{PRESENT.}

Can you tell me what happened?
CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED?

When I looked down
the dot on my wrist
grew
wings and flew.

It was a roach.
It was just ^{A GHOST}
a roach.

And, I have to tell you,
in case you weren't there: ^{PRESENT!}
I laughed. ^{HAHA!}

I found myself on the floor,
but it was just ^{THE SEA} a cockroach

crawling over my wrist

like a salve,

or a blade,

relief up the arm

like a vein.

Other Gifts: A Lesson

By now, I understand:
you have a thing for bugs.

I guess, we live so long
with the grotesque

it becomes lovely again.
Slowly, you are teaching me

of fear and how it comes
to rest in the quiet places.

Up here, we are all
taking leave. The truce is on,

and an uneasy agreement lurks
in the way we move

around the house, bumping hips
like sisters in sleep.

I have come
to find comfort

—

with the spider in the tub,
always single and light,

—

with our willingness
not to hurt one another.

—

You see, I'm trying
to let her live.

I am picking up the bottle.
I am closing my eyes.
I am washing my hair
without peeking.

—

Sometimes, I am sure
you hear, I even hum,
mistake a strand of mine
for something she's spun.

Alley

The neighbors are fighting as she gets more hysterical he becomes a laugh until her throat clots thicker thicker with Mississippi heat I want to tell her it's a special kind of wild makes a woman stay an easy hell for men who walk every deadbeat exists because only three women had my father as a father one man had my father as a father though he's a father now all the rest well I don't know what they've had but I've had enough men ask *where do you want me to come* to know we're all confused about how this should work outside the brush cats are yowling in heat and in fight sounding like me on so many too many first sniffs hearing my own self call the way it sounds like I have on so many too many last nights with Mississippi white in my craw I've come into every love with claws bared left everyone I've left every one with flesh in my teeth bloodied like how by now that she-neighbor's claimed the car for an hour sometimes turning the engine over turning every thought too many times he-neighbor's long left down the street another woman comes over to the car cracks the door to the cold I want to call it's a special kind of rage yes a woman's rage is common but perfect a perfect kind of ire makes a woman come yes come yes please yes stay.

Tinder

Prelude like a Quaalude

I.

He comes to me in a dream
and tells me, *You've gotta
let the engagement thing go.*

The Ex, he tells me this
from the safe distance of a car-length.

Even in my dreams,
he is afraid.

So I go, face deep
into every man I meet.

A pill, many a sip,
it is always this way with me:

down after down,
and when the dark droops,
my clothes follow.

II.

When The Ex quit, I burned
his work pants on the gravel
walk of my new apartment,

used mosquito repellent
like lighter fluid—
this, my Mississippi way.

He worked too many nights
in Larry's kitchen, so the fryer
grease caught really good

and the jean legs ran hot
into the yard, left

the outline of a man,
black in the weeds,
a shadow I cross every day.

I kept the zipper,
hold that pull in my mouth
at times, feel

its weight. But any lasting
heat is metallic, chemical,
imagined. Nothing

like his fingerprint etched
on my tongue.

I kept the zipper,
though I've lost
the ring. *Cheap,*

is a relative term,
but one I've always liked.

The Ex told me
I was *difficult to love*.
So I've become easy.

From *Be a Tinder Master*

THE REVIEW:

“Tinder is a location-based social discovery application that facilitates communication between mutually interested users, allowing matched users to chat.”

– Wikipedia

Be a Tinder Master is the **ultimate playbook** for scoring hot dates with real women **very** quickly. I went from getting hardly no matches at all to suddenly having way too many meet-ups with **super sexy** women. Chad makes sure you get great results too. Check it out! You’re gonna crush it.

– Brandon, Tinder User

Errata: Her Infinite Variety

Three from Tennessee.
One from Texas,
Florida,
Virginia,
Georgia,
Alabama,
Louisiana,
Jamaica,
Kentucky,
Wyoming.
Three Mississippi boys.
(Not a real Yankee
in the bunch.)

A few cooks.
A musician.
A surgeon.
A novelist.
A dealer.
Four bartenders.
Three women.
Some “poets.”
Sports fans.

The Exes.
The Big Red Freaks.
The Ones I Like.

A bunch of teachers.
Two true friends.
Mostly strangers.
More than one
politician.
A couple.

And a couple I remember
nothing about,
except tattoos
and what they said
to try and make themselves
feel bigger.

The Big Red Freak

I hate fucking a man who's watched too much porn to be creative. I think this as a great big, reddening freak is hard pumping behind me.

And sure, I love taking a cock down doggy-style, but what of the finer points?

The dewy weight of a well-timed *O* or my good hair between his thighs, up on his belly, his couch, his bed, bath, drain, dog's fur, beer backseat, brush, mouth, heater, hair—my hair in his soft hair.

Lose your razor?

the freak speaks, pants
a giggle, his finger lolling slick
in after-cum ease. I'll swallow
this question. Not carefully detail
how there's nothing appealing to me
about a grown man spread-eagle,
foot propped on the toilet and a Bic in his hand.
Not quote Cisneros: *The knife I carry is abstract.*
Not begin to think
of a splatter film ending: His barrel-body
locked tight in a corset, me coming
forward with the feather duster.

The Ex Texts

The Ex:

9:00am

I'm broke.

Me:

9:04am

i got free coffe from that place
you like...

10:15am

I like coffee. I like that place.

10:17am

I like you.

11:33am

It's -7 here already.

11:33am

And snowing. Fuck elevation.

11:36am

That's real cold. Bundle Up!
Cuddle down!

3:26pm

Mississippi fall makes me love
you so hard

3:31pm

I know that doesnt make since
but its rt

3:54pm

I miss you.

2:28am

I wana fuck you si bad rn

12:09pm

Whoo! Got wasted last night.

12:41pm

Sry.

1:16pm

Don't be like that.

Everything Round Like a Screw

When a thing just isn't
setting tight & you've known it
to be off for a while.
putting your right
forefinger on the cap—
the common creed
of a thinking hand, saying:

Hold on now.

Stop a minute.

Release the hooks
on that years-old bra.

It's relief like a body
slipping through a tire's center

into the Mississippi.

From *Be a Tinder Master*

STEP ONE: *Get her talking.*

The usual “hi hello” **sucks**. She gets **thousands** of heys a day.

Remember: **Longer performs better**. (Right? ;)

Test out a few of these funny lines and see what works best for you:

- “Hey **name** have you seen my white horse?”
- “Wanna make out in my mom’s car?”
- “Hey, I might be a killer, but at least I’m not a serial killer!”

At some point, she’ll ask what you do for a living. Have an answer **prepared**, but try not to exaggerate **too much**. “Working on a start-up soon!” sounds better than “I’m unemployed and unsure what to do next.”

The most important thing here is to come across as **nonchalant** and not like some needy creep. Suggest something that won’t take much time, so she can call it off if you creep her out.

Some girls are just a **huge time waster**.

The Big Red Freak

wants me
to come.

Come, he says.
Come.

Like I'm a mutt
and not a woman
with a pussy.

Shake.

Sometimes he adds,
baby or for me,
as in,

Come for me, baby.

I think of these little
enticements like treats—
the metaphorical bone
to his raging hard-on.

Sit.

Some nights, I'm a dancing
bear. I'll ride
the unicycle, play with a pair
of tambourines.

Or I'm a showgirl, high
on the neon feathers
tickling the skin
behind my ears.

I'm washed and shined
and shimmering and shimmying
and five dollars a pop and gone
like a ghost in the morning.

But this is no circus,
no titty bar,
and I'm not balancing
a ball on my nose.

Come, he says.

*Why don't you
roll over, baby?*

a thumb up like
good girl

in my asshole and the other
fingers frantic in their waving
for attention.

Still, some night, I'll meet
The One I Like,

and he shall hear the dove
in my throat,
and I will *come*,
and I will *stay*,
and I will
speak his name.

I will remember it,
forget my own
self.

Then, he can put a collar on my neck
and make me *beg*, or walk
me down the street—

my tongue drooling out my teeth,
him grinning like a fool.

The Ex Becoming

What I remember most about that night is the roach leg wiggling out a slit in the colander—limbs spread, the countertop—then the head slipped through and she came like a grown woman. I remember other things too: Lying like a corpse on the tile to get closer to the box-fan, hearing my own voice cut by the blades and return to me an unfamiliar tremble through the stifled air. Then, trying not to breathe at all, afraid the smell would make me sick—catbox in the corner, wet dog food in the grout, that unmistakable iron in the blood. There was a busted porch bulb, and there was ringing glass. But The Ex's boots were long gone. I was there, so I know what happened. I was there counting up then down to stay calm, and alive.

One. Two. Three.

Say four.

Say four.

Four.

Five. Five. Four...

You will want to know if any of it was good or if it was only awful. It was. Am I lonely tonight? Yes. And then, on that night too? Yes. Then too.

And I was lonely
when he filled my kitchen.

The One I

Like is a word newly learned,
rests on my tongue fresh,
and is suddenly everywhere,
so common it's a wonder
I never knew sooner
that familiar stutter of guts
at a bowlegged boy
dancing through the bar,
a hand and hello at every elbow,
never tasted caramel
dripping down my throat
at the sight and sounds of him.

From *Be a Tinder Master*

STEP FOUR: *Seduce her.*

The girl might not sleep with you, **because** you're **great**.

Girls **actually think** this way!

If you're handsome, smart, nice, why wouldn't she hold off on having a one-night stand with you? She might not do you **even if** she's horny because she's placed you in the "boyfriend-to-be" zone. You'd be **surprised** how often girls choose not to sleep with guys that they like.

Try this line: "*I want to treat you like a princess... But just for tonight!*"

Perked

The word *slut*
is beautiful
to look at—
slender, precise,
a sprig
of sound
against my teeth.
I love the music
of a clean
line,
and I floss,
sometimes,
leave a worm
of blood
in the sink.
What I mean
is: I could
straight-pin
through this life
as well
as anyone else.
But I'd rather squeal
belly up,
ask anyone,
any real razer,
to split me
snout to tail.

To a Friend, Newly Alone

On the anniversary of what will be your divorce,
I come to your house with hands readied
to wipe or hide or hold your face. I come
fleet-footed to jig a boot-stomp or bolt
with all your ribbons in my case. Let us
ride on sticks of broom or bloom
our bodies into a pair of fragile pinks.
My mother-friend, my poet-bud, my naked-
heart chanteuse, lovers are divine,
but I bring a dry-bodied bond. Come,
there are daughters in the bath. Come,
there are books on the floor. Come, come,
my dear darkfly, there are days and days
and many more days awaiting the light
of your crackling life. Ask me to away,
and I am your heavy-boned bird. Tell me
to away, and I am gone. But never alone
shall you be in this span, my sisterless
gal. I am your sister now. You are the right
kind of reeling, spinning up and out.
So, let them come to the deck,
those spirits in the field. Let them rail
at the door. I am the witchdoctor
here. I sit, pen poised, ready to suture or cut
whatever wound needs my word the most.

Another Poem about The Big Red Freak and Hair

I.

I get a call at 3:22am.
The Big Red Freak is drunk.

At least, the girl giggling
into his receiver must be:

*Does the carpet
match the drapes?*

She's hysterical: *Firecrotch!*
and the line beeps off.

Surprising to me, this phone call
is not the first of its kind.

I finger my
Nutrisse-76 Hot Tamale locks

and consider the question,
the phrase, *hardwood*,

and the irony of my bedroom curtains'
Tennessee orange tint—

a filter that made The Ex name
that space, *The Red-light District*.

II.

In college, a boy I'd nicknamed
Frankenstein decided to go for it—

my tramp stamp and shaved head,
my feigned disdain for men.

For him, I must have been
an experiment,

and though we actually dated
a couple months,

he eventually believed me

when I told him:

I don't like you. I'm just bored.
So we broke up.

I've since learned to avoid men
who call me *sweet*.

The Ex once told me,
as if a shocking revelation: *You're not*

a nice person. And I
finally felt understood.

Two years out of school,
when The Ex and I were together,

I got the ring.
A sloshed voice, whitegirlwasted

and spitting into Franky's phone:
Does the carpet match the drapes?

III.

Whatever anxiety my existence unearthed
inside these curious barbers,

I'd like to turn it with my forked tongue,
cup their pierced ears and whisper:

*Come on over
and see for yourself.*

From *Be a Tinder Master*

STEP SIX: *Find out if she is hot real life.*

Girls have **millions** of ways to look better in pics. **Technology** gives them thousands of fixes to hide their true selves.

Remember: **women keep tricks up their sleeve**, transforming normal girls into sexy ones!

What you want to see: A **full body** shot. Not lots of poses with cutesie faces. Those girls are trying to hide that they aren't comfortable with their bodies. You don't want that. What you want to see: Pics that are more "I don't care what I look like" types.

Dude, don't get duped!

A Girl or Oops! I Did It Again

There's a girl with The One I Like,
and this upsets me.

She's wild,
I hear. *Must be a magical cunt,*

says my girlfriend, who's lost
a couple men. *She respects*

power, another doe-eyed wisp
of a woman whispers.

It's not that I like games.
It's just that I like this One,
and have come to find women,
like the one he's with, are usually

rather desperate
in the way
of female friends.

So I seduce her
with the promise
of a secret to tell.

I know, despite my own desperate
moves, his lips
will eventually find
their way to her large, clean
teeth, his finger
the crescent moons
on either side of her

smile.

So I'm making that voyage

first.

I take her into my mouth.
Because I will not have him,

but I will be everywhere he goes—
on top and inside of her.

Here, do you like a breast?
Here, what about the tender box?

Oh this, this little bead?
Can you uncover its quiver

the way I can?

This gap-legged woman,
doesn't scare me a bit.

Come here, little lady,
I've got a few tricks to teach you.

Lie down.
Learn something.

Bitch, say my name.

as if it were
my own,
without him
even noticing
the sepia sense of it.
Many years
had passed
since I was held
that way
by a man.
His sleep was female—
near, honest,
the body lax and warm
like a sister's.
And he night-fucked
like a woman too,
never unbuckled his jeans,
made me red
with want.
I am embarrassed
by my lust for him.
That is a true thing:
my curdled pride
craves
the familiar
earthiness
of his clay
jaw and disquieting
smallness
of his eyes.
But this is no love
poem, please
understand.
He, being so slender,
just disappeared
like steam
from my rolling boil.

The Blue Line Boy

The boy on the 8:45 Blue Line drop-off, breaks
my heart every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
morning—

climbing the bus steps with a limp
exaggerated to sprained ankle status or subtle
as swag, depending on how much pick-up
was played last night.

I got to...

... God blest me...

with the opportunity

to play college ball...

he says.

What follows is a litany
of injuries and a story about throwing
the Atlanta Sunbelt league,
just the one game,
not because the knee gave, but because of fear
and a *loss of velocity.*

This admittance to strange riders
blooms like a peony—

a fist sized
floral tremble—

inside of me.

Green veins stem
his forearm—

training years etched
like a tattoo raised,
razing the body—

make my fingertips slick inside
this morning's dark.

But he couldn't Romeo-romance
the game,

carries a book like a mitt in his left hand,
has just a little wiggle in the joint,
just a little wince.

And there are others,

besides,

like Tim "The Freak" Lincecum

His Diddy, says the boy,

*put a buck on the ground
and tell him scoop it up.*

And I imagine his daddy
did something the like.

How mine hit a diamond of nails
through the threads of a busted

tire into the flesh of our backyard tree.
Seen from the road, practice was a swing

with an invisible rope. We had a good bat
and an old bat. And *better* meant *alone*.

And though the sound of a metal on rubber on wood
rings through my childhood—

not as often
as it should have, I now know:

love is a game of skill, and the wounds
we sustain are no matter of luck,

but of how much you work a thing, to run the rut
so deep there's no stitching the seams that loose us.

From *Be a Tinder Master*

THE REVIEW: *Comment Section.*

JOSH: I followed your step-by-step tutorial and now even more beautiful women are trying to date me. It really works!

MATT: Shut-up Josh. You're fat.

RANDY: Women are emotional. They hardwired to respond to dickhead Alpha Male tactics these days... They just wanna be banged that's what Tinder is al about. Or maybe it's just where I'm from

AARON: u sir r a gentleman and a scholar.

WENDY: I don't like Tinder because it's not working

SARA: Same.

EDDY: Why do you tow even need Tinder? You're cute enough to get a date on your own.

RICK: Date me first!

WENDY: ☺

EDDY: Wanna meet up?

EDDY: ???

EDDY: Dumb bitch. That's why it's not working.

EDDY: You have to respond.

CHAZ: Dude, you sux. Ha!

JAMES: So I'm really hoping she's "the one" even though I'm only 16 I'm not some idiot who just says they "love" anyone. I just hope it's not awkward in person, I'd really appreciate some tips of what to say for the party, it's in a month so I have a lot of time I shall let you all know how it went. thanks guys

DREW: This is fucking dumb.

The Ex

For Trey

of course, wasn't all bad.
His wingspan, for example, was wide and spare, spread

out like a map of the south descending range.
I could level my body there, didn't have to curl,

could lank from ankle to crown, straight as a telephone wire
and feel the full east coast behind me

like a bed of feathers, wrist to headboard wrist.
And he was tall in the way of politicians and other

trustworthy men, like them, a master
of long and lonely flights. Even now, I almost sense

him moving past me, so measured the wind stills
in his wake, breathes again only when he is gone.

But today, my ex leans against the prairies of the west,
those fields found sighing among snow peaked rises

that make lungs dare, that make words thin,
that make earth and men solid and quiet.

Yes, today, he lets his hound loose off the leash
and snaps its leather like a belt, sets bedlam with a shot,

watches the spotted tongue flung-out and slapping,
jackrabbits in fear further from the road. He watches

his beloved become the hunt, open lines making it easy
to see. For miles, the dog chasing his game. For miles and miles,

he watches, knowing loyalty and thirst's call
will join fatigue and ease the animal, bring him bending

back, spine waving like weary grass, head swaying
as a beast's slow lowing, the whole world resting heavy.

What of distance unrecoverable? What of space stretched to mute?

This day, like all days, is assured to him. The dog will return.

See how far he runs, the body
just a speck in the dusk. See, he is a glisten,

slipping too far ahead, just air, a draft.
Or look, there, is that his late day turning?

I love you this much.

A Selfie

With God as my horn, my lips don't blow much sweet.
Father, I promise, I never give myself to any man

or woman without guilt. Love would be
the music of mercy. But now I fuck for myself.

This morning: A redheaded woodpecker (imagine that!),
slick with rain on the roof, drilling some stiff tin down—

ting ting ting ting ting
his game cries ringing into the mist—

and the manna and the grass through my toes,
and a tree like a woman-body growing wet in the yard.

My hands are on the hem of my nightgown, and the man inside
is waiting for me to show him the origin of sound.

I'd like to go back, just once, to that first time:
God, my father, watching. Or so I suspected I could be seen.

Nobody covering my mouth. No body pacing my breath.
Only me, and the tune I was learning to stroke.

Moral

Our bodies sense the world changing. Spring has fallen like a pot to the floor, a mess of green ripening the earth beneath this house. Our weeping winter fires grown brittle, we are all out here with smoke and beer, waiting for the roar to start. Yes. What can we say to one another, except: *Sit. Eat. Stay. Sleep. Be here. Be here with me. Be here and see.* When it comes, God grant us the abandon to strain into its hymn together. Scent of hair and skin. We are all going to burn. Spring makes me think we might as well mix our limbs with our neighbors', might as well suck deeply, fill our hands with all that is wet. In famine, our table is set. And here is my body. Here, the red blood.

I will remember you.

VITA

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EDUCATION

University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi

M.F.A in Creative Writing: Poetry, (anticipated) May 2016

Thesis: *Here. Come.: A Poetry Collection*, Ann Fisher-Wirth (Director), Derrick Harriell (Creative Reader), Jay Watson (Critical Reader)

College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio

B.A. in English, Jonas O. Notestein Prize for 2011 Valedictorian, May 2011

Thesis: “Sweet Coiling: A Poetry Manuscript,” Daniel Bourne (Director), Deborah Shostack (Second Reader), Donaldson Prize for best senior project

The Newberry Seminar: Research in the Humanities, Chicago, Illinois

Independent Study through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest

Thesis: “Reading the Faces: Portraiture as a Means to Investigate Representational Containment of Native Americans,” Jane Rhodes, Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and Chair of American Studies at Macalester College (Director), Associated Colleges of the Midwest, Outstanding Research Award

Girls Preparatory School, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Secondary, Cum Laude, May 2007

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Contemporary Poetics, American Poetry, Twentieth Century American Literature, Creative Writing, African American Literature, Feminist Theory, Studio Art, Art History

RELATED COURSEWORK

Engl 606: Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales, Steven Justice

Engl 682: Documentary Poetry, Ann Fisher-Wirth

Engl 682: Poetry Seminar (Workshop), Dave Smith, Derrick Harriell, Ann Fisher-Wirth

Engl 679: Blues Poetry, Derrick Harriell

Engl 679: Narrative Poetry, Dave Smith
Engl 759: Black Voices from Prison, Patrick Alexander
Engl 769: Whitman & Dickinson, Christin Ellis
Engl 770: American Women Poets, Ann Fisher-Wirth

AWARDS AND PUBLICATIONS

Paul Q. White Prize in English (2011); Finalist, Lex Allen Poetry Award, Hollins University (2011); Nominee, The Association of Writers and Writing Programs, Intro Journals Project (2011), "For the Record," "Stamps," A Community of Voices (2010); "The Old Guitarist," The Goliard, (2010)

WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES AND SERVICE

Panelist: 6th Annual Civil Rights Conference, Meridian, Mississippi: "Teaching Social Justice through

Writing in the Classroom" (June 2016)

Panelist: Sarah Isom Center: Gender and Sexuality Conference: "Sex(uality), Bodies, and Identity in

Contemporary Poetry" (2016)

Event Host & Co-Director, Committee Member: One Hundred Thousand Poets for Change: Poetry for the Himalayas (2015)

Creative Chair: Southern Writers Southern Writing 21st Annual Graduate Conference (2015)

Co-Founder: Bedlam Reading Series: A Poetry Happening (2014)

Participant: Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, David Baker (Workshop Director), (2012)

Participant: Sewanee Writers' Conference, Dave Smith (Workshop Director) (2012)

Participant: The San Miguel Writers' Conference, Judith Baker (Workshop Director); Henry J. Copeland Fund

Grant (2011)

Participant: The Kenyon Review Writers' Workshop, David Baker (Workshop Director); Lilly Fund, Wooster

Grant (2010)

RECENT READINGS

Off Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, May 2016 (Scheduled)

Shelter Off the Square, Oxford, Mississippi, May 2016 (Scheduled)

Broken English, Oxford, Mississippi, April 2016 (Scheduled)

Trobar Ric, Oxford, Mississippi, February 2015

Bedlam II, Oxford, Mississippi, January 2015

Writers on the Road, Carbondale, Illinois, October 2014

Broken English, Oxford, Mississippi, November 2013

CLASSES TAUGHT

Writ 101: Writing & Rhetoric 101

Writ: 102 Writing & Rhetoric 102

Engl 223: Pre-Civil War American Literature, Teaching Assistant to Caroline Wigginton

Engl 226: British Literature since Romanticism, Teaching Assistant to Ian Whittington

Engl 302: Introduction to Creative Writing: Poetry & Prose

Engl 317: Advanced Poetry Workshop

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant, Ann Fisher-Wirth, Professor of English, University of Mississippi (2015)

Tutor, McCallie School, Chattanooga, Tennessee (2011)

Tutor, College of Wooster Writing Center, Wooster, Ohio (2009-2011)

Reader, Artful Dodge Literary Journal & The Goliard (2009-2011)

Research Assistant, Gregory Foster-Rice, Professor of Photography, Columbia College (2009)

Teaching Apprentice, Marnia Mangubi, Professor of Art, College of Wooster (2009)

REFERENCES

Christin Ellis, Assistant Professor, University of Mississippi

Ann Fisher-Wirth, Professor of English, University of Mississippi

Derrick Harriell, Assistant Professor, University of Mississippi