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## and it's also the smell of laundry

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and it's also the smell of laundry

BY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in English  
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## ABSTRACT

This collection of poems brings to life the idea that in a poet's world, every day life and every single occurrence is a possible subject. Included are works brought on from the worst of circumstances, the youngest of memories, the happiest moments, and even the simplest of thoughts. The collection is autobiographical and reflective, a re-creation of the events taken place with the addition of present knowledge. The work here gives proof to the idea of cohesion between content and art form – it proves the notion that how something is being said is just as, if not more, important than what is being said itself. Concrete imagery full of sensory details, a distinct voice given through language and rhythm, and passionate, truthful emotion are only some of the specific interests found in the following pages.

*and it's also the smell of laundry* is a collection that celebrates the cohesion of content and form, interweaves experience and art itself. This collection embraces experience, gives reason to the past, and gives strength to the present. It is autobiographical, written from painful, colorful, miserable, ecstatic, and even mundane moments. But it is also carefully crafted, true to the form, and embodies perfectly the idea of art itself as it is the carefully constructed form and tools within each piece that bring to life the experiences themselves.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

These words originated from every moment of my life  
but have been committed to paper only because of the few people  
who saw beauty in them  
and in me.

## DEDICATION

Thank you Jennifer Elyse Karr for never leaving my side  
and always answering at 3 AM.

Thank you Sean Alexander Landolt for laughing, loving, and  
believing in me when I didn't.

Thank you Terry Thaxton for seeing in me something I couldn't.

And thank you Riley Cadence Miranda, for giving me a reason  
and a dream to strive for.

This is for you.

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## Renovations

Breeze echoes and headlights  
rush past in waves.

This will be new again.

A baby born. Savior

caressed in yellow glow  
that remains familiar.

She is not the same  
as yesterday. I am  
naked in the sun.



## How to Fake It

Convince him this won't matter in the morning.  
Shut the door,  
as breathing fills the room  
loud enough to cause a blush  
and his hand travels past your thighs, in.

Say something harsh.  
Possessive terms go out the window,  
“think about whoever you want” and the tables turn.  
Stop looking into his eyes.

Smile. Don't force it  
as his lips touch your neck.  
Close your eyes every minute or so.  
Let him grab you, let him feel control. Remember, you are his  
saving grace.

He's not asleep so say it first,  
those three words don't matter.

Take weight in each step.  
Screams and curses fill your ears, inaudible.  
Break bread. Eyes downcast. Look repentant  
as last night's eyeliner smudges across your cheekbone.

## Piano at Dawn

The notes are rhythmic, loud  
as you screech out of key  
as I misinterpret your eyes,  
make you my reason and  
fill you into holes that need patched.

My affection is misplaced in you, I know.  
I also know (remember?) this feeling  
as the sun beats down on flesh,  
as I watch you gracefully, comically drop off  
the side of that wave

you almost catch.  
You are his carbon copy, but opposite.  
Age hasn't turned you. No,  
age hasn't even begun.

You turn your head slightly left  
and I read names in cursive,  
six words that cause bonds to break.  
Your fingers glide onto the keys  
strong, porcelain and ebony begging  
for lyrical seduction.

Your mouth stays silent  
as I wish my bony form  
onto the cushion beside you.

## There Are No Apologies Necessary

(1)

Your smile  
in exchange for fine particles of crystallized leaves  
scattered into the rifts of hard wood  
and seed. It got worse.

Foreign language, from movies and TV shows  
I was never allowed to see  
spout from the mouth I ached for  
at some point, in a distant city  
from years I can barely remember, can't seem to forget,  
let go, forgive.

The inadequacy hung above sweat stained  
pillows as we slept.

You know, maroon and violet can't be hidden by NC20, NW25, Medium/Yellow-Green at \$30 a  
pop.

And then came: Slammed,  
the wall, Brandon Boyd under glass rushing toward my back.  
You have large pores,  
black heads in the crevice of your nose  
and up close, with clammy skin, you shake.

(2)

I became senseless when our bodies intertwined.  
Please believe me when I say that this was real, and hollow.

The lisp of your words were memorized  
causing an ecstasy that refused re-entrance,  
causing a little girl to fall  
into restless sleep  
(pacify the needs that aren't shown  
while clinging to cotton, a faded purple,  
unrecognized face, and a mother who has already had her chance)

But the asphalt turned wet.  
Water ran through my veins, drenched  
the earth, the curb,  
your permanent grave.

No marigolds, lilies, yellow roses half open,  
just cigarette butts unwrapped, grit and shell.  
I wanted to bash my head into the parking block,  
20 feet from the moment I pricked my finger  
and fell away from her.

You told me to never change

as I scraped nails and skin,  
repeatedly pleading the atmosphere  
to fill in gashes,  
wash out wounds with antiseptic.

(3)

The first day air raced up my nostrils, unbound,

Then suffocation from August, September, October,  
Times New Roman, 12 point font, and yellow tinted cuticles  
tumbled behind the carbon fiber break lines off US 1.

I spat confessions, spat  
devotion or hatred, scorched  
my lungs with Marlboro 27's  
on that porch off Sagola. You found your enemy,  
and a wolf spider lay in the corner,  
limbs drawn and quartered as punishment for potential espionage.  
"Let it be," you said, (I say now)  
as 2 A.M. came and passed,  
threat ticked in hours from behind two doors  
where your wife slept in denial,  
where we sat 3 feet from contact,  
and you taught me how to laugh again.

And now,  
and now this.  
This felony of phonetics  
of syllables that call unto nostalgic times.  
Your eyes blaze blue,  
with no remorse in the soft-pink  
lips that disappear from your face.

Okaasan

Octaves higher with the left over taste of oil, oregano  
and my tongue lacks smoke.  
Rain pierces the charade, happy charade,  
falling faster.

I speak to you like a child,  
enunciation on my vowel sounds and spitting “t’s” like crosses.  
Bloated with syllables that coexist.  
Mother—Mother—may I?  
But you can’t reply and believe there is something left off those words.

My father and fiancé step sideways to smother sound in droplets.  
My daughter cries for attention from inside the silver Jetta,  
the windshield darkens her skin, tints it gray.

You do not see that I am not her.  
I cannot be her.  
She wore a sundress from JC Penney’s while three paychecks of silk hung  
in her closet  
and walked down tile lined with patio furniture for you.

I will not amount to anything, you told me that night  
to the child you now pretend is yours,  
to the one you could never reach.  
You caress her face when she calls out. You forget that face belongs to me.

She is not. She is not. She is not.

I sucked ice and pushed plastic, hard  
while you told me I wasn’t a woman.  
I grew and tore in diagonal lines, septic  
while you denied me for choosing modern medicine.  
And living across from you, across the hall  
served as a prison cell. You did not see.  
I blame you for this family, though you only knew love once.  
*“Are you in love with him?”*  
I blame you for lying to the man with thick hair, the man I love.  
*“I was.”*

I am not the little girl with braids,  
not the teenager who cowers in her room.  
I have formed breasts and coarse hair.

I have from behind, on top and backwards.  
And what do you have? You have a cotton patched comforter  
and four pillows to warm where he should be.  
You have a man with long hair to beg  
at night when your groins ache.

The taste of chocolate dries my mouth.  
Your hair is braided long and gray.  
I will wear mine short.

## In Vain I Cry Out to You

Let's countdown, speak destiny,  
*Glory be to the Father,*  
naive destiny,  
*and to the son.*

Itch our new eyes while we pine and bitch  
and nurture, nurture for only redemption.  
*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin.*  
The emptiness overwhelms, begs forgiveness.  
It blasts and bashes heads for calm.

Speak slowly with mindless minds,  
you know it is coming—the end,  
her ends as he raises her sins, that rush  
*But you were washed, you were sanctified.*

*You were justified in the name of the Lord.*  
Release as rockets fall  
collapse earth and metal. *Shh,*  
that quiet whisper, can you hear it grow,  
growing like winter arising; a memory.  
Speak soft, speak. Speak, and scream.  
It flashes before your eyes as bombs blaze.  
He knows it's you.  
He knows you stayed. Just you,  
you teased and carried her, lied  
for her, for her, for her.  
*Glory be to the father*

Find home. Find solace. And we agreed upon this didn't we?  
*In His holy name I pray.*  
The end of all. The steel wall that haunts?  
The violin that sounds sweetly—  
It grows like night fire, wild fire, waits  
with anticipation grim and ghastly while you slip  
surely into the city you call home.

These pending colors in evergreen and orange.  
You call and call, no  
sound awakens. It stops  
and starts like rise, like fall. The trophies,  
the monsters from your inner child,



grow deeper as you find nothing  
but bleak, but gray.

With symbols crashing it sounds.  
With piercing eardrums groups fly onto sand.  
And I am left, a whistle in the wind.  
It fades while your mother calls, *And to the son*  
empties her dishrag of soot and Satan;  
that rag you burned in a previous life.  
Your father's blood, it reeks of you; your  
sin, your taste buds and that sweet scent,  
*and to the Holy Spirit.*  
Commit. Commit and fly  
as you dull the knife and cut the surface  
with red ivory that once was time,  
white and melancholy, forgotten like the sea in you.

Can you hear it growing? Shooting  
fire and flame like wars and gods?  
This crown of thorns, adorned and set, pushed  
down on flesh, slippery with silence  
in the light of this fire.

*As it was in the beginning.*  
Quiver with clenched fists and promise to take all the air I breathe in--  
*Is now.*  
The light brings you down as rockets fall--  
*And ever shall be.*  
Eye sight making dust on promise land--  
*World without end.*  
And quiet pounding is all I have to offer, *Amen.*

Smoke & Mirrors

*--an acrostic for you*

Because vessels beat for longer than it took to unwrap  
each word laced with unfamiliar  
circular meanings and a grip,  
ash and grit that I find, still, under brown couch cushions. Because  
untamed (passionate or wild) and the vague resemblance of chivalry.  
Since then I have cleared, that cold I had for months  
Evaporated. As if your touch meant nothing.  
Your face is faded along with others in the distance  
of reality. I've decided it was innocence versus maturity. *Please*

*understand, we don't know what we  
feel when we are immersed.*

Each impulse crashes down over the next with no  
lifeline to grasp, to catch for breath,  
to grip for solace, in that summer of storms. And then  
laughter takes over in first meetings,  
infiltrates the noise of two years and counting.  
Knives cut smooth through  
each muscle and tissue falls  
softly onto the pillow beside me. I wake up to  
morning, to tangerine-grey sunrise and ocean blue, fixated. Because

ocean blue offers no excuses or altered meanings. Because it  
keeps no demons with  
each eyelash black and building on the one before.  
And because tan skin rushes over, creates blush pink fire and collapses  
nameless collages of face, head, hair, lips.  
Details of "girl meets boy" turn to smoke in the single  
moment of recognition, of touch. The last  
image releases. The man, the boy, and that  
reach toward the door, hands stretch outward and open, that  
reach toward a lighter, the cast iron table, the walk  
outside, no seats open, no introductions,  
racing heart, his face, his knowing  
smirk, the concrete stains of mud like mirrors.

## What I Haven't (Have?) Said

I couldn't concentrate on words I had no interest in,  
involvement in.

A woman's history, a country's story,  
means nothing without a binding force.

I forgot. I never treaded back,  
refused re-entry.

The water is stagnant, breeds  
bacteria and larvae.

It's cold, vacant.

Sing-song voices repeat their daily chants,

*"It's okay, honey.*

*You're doing the right thing"*

an herbal tea to ease the pain.

And I haven't told you.

And I don't know why,

except that maybe I spoke too soon

or you did.

These things I write, have committed

are not sins. They are

a woman's history, a life's story.

## There is Such Thing as Regret

I know that fairytale heroes live in her world.  
Running as her taffeta dress in rose circles around her,  
we bow before the princess as she anoints us with her chop-stick wand.

I know that tea time means Sleeping Beauty and Ariel  
deep in conversation,  
as the trays drain and fill with imaginary pastries and sugar cubes.

I know that true love exists in her dreams.  
Her eyes twitch and lips pacify to comfort held in colored plastic.  
A crutch that re-introduces itself each night I break my promise.

I know that beacons of light 10 feet away guide her to safety  
when the dragons creep in,  
when the witches in black capes offer poison.  
She wakes up in silent tears searching for my hand.

I know that mornings without too many kisses imprint permanently on the subconscious.

I know that her knights in shining armor are those with big smiles and strong arms,  
that praise when the peddles go in the right direction,  
coming just long enough for her to memorize names  
then fade into memories and longing for something she does not understand.

I know that her tears and “I miss you’s” come far to frequent,  
that these fairytales will one day die-out.  
Rust gradually corrodes armor as gowns tear  
and fill black plastic with childhood.  
It’s all yours for \$3 a pop.

For Him

She sits, half conscious (half the time)

letting down concrete walls, bricks and boards.

Breaking them, cracking them with every bone  
and stare.

Where he sits, calm (please be honest),  
inhaling her anxieties.

Where they sit together.

[A play on letters, words if combined. It's a mystery  
how lives intertwine with no purpose, but reason  
that has reached the surface when least expected.]

Vows made at ungodly hours  
in unprofessional words and contexts.

    "I just saw a shooting star."

    "Make a wish," and so it starts,  
        has already begun.

His eyes are blue,  
the ocean begging her to release,  
exhale, dive in.

His lips graze her hair (breathe she tells herself).

His hand opens as her fingers find his.

An invitation, a place,  
a home pleading.

## Evenings I Can't Remember Happiness

Hands upraised, pull slowly through knotted strands of hair and I repeat *de-stress*, *de-stress*, *distress*. These hands that don't realize lips don't feel the same any longer when pressed and shoved. Spit like ash, the after taste of rum. What should be meaningful, romantic or wanted turned forced and mechanical, No means no but words don't reach the inner ear, the left side brain, right side or cerebrum something, the technical term I never memorized in Biology four years before. The walls are empty while "Please" and "Thank you" notes lay in crumpled masses somewhere in a red suitcase.

*You may be right, I don't win awards for the person I've been, become, but who made you God?*

These hands in places they no longer belong, trespassing on territory and skin that is not claimed, never forged, not yours. These hands that should not still push down on hip bones, kneed bone to bone while my head turns leaving reddish brown curls on the pillow. My vacant eyes stare out the closed window. I plead, beg for you to stop, but your forehead creases harder. The window is already shut and closed while fingers pry, thrust. I see dust where you forgot to clean.

## The Little Mermaid (part i)

I was young, 5 or 6. It was spring, summer.  
The grass was green as Southern California.

And on 13<sup>th</sup> street our house stood, brick. Three bedrooms  
and a playhouse on the split-level yard out back,  
white paint and black widows.  
Back in the rectangle frame held my grandmother's room.  
White light poured in from the window, here  
I discover myself. Too young on a white  
day bed, wrought iron posts rusted at the bolts.

I was raised on Disney.  
Fairytale and unrequited wishes (heroines and heroes I could never be)  
filled with passion and lust (am I remembering incorrectly?)  
Do you remember The Little Mermaid? Do you remember Eric –?  
Brawny, dark hair and muscular,  
(I admit my memory may be tainted.) I pretended I was Ariel,  
jealous of her genetics in red.

My skin touched skin between layers  
of cotton panties and Gymboree overalls. My fingers forced themselves and wedged,  
face pressed hard against the pillow. Smashed, rhythmic, repeated,  
as stale saliva flowed onto white lace-trimmed pillowcases,  
vintage and ancient like she who caught me.  
My head pounding, heart beating, jet-black  
pigtails increase in sweat with each new find.  
I was she. I had him.

Rub, touch. Rub, touch, feel. And I was pretty  
for once. I was grown up,  
too fast, too soon (because it all started then)  
to a fictional being.

## The Little Mermaid (part ii)

The unknown pulsing  
and aching-- it stopped. Calm, calm,  
calm while yellow-tan appendages slowed, savored  
the moment.

Wooden door creaked open fast,  
faster than I could cover up.

My triangle legs face down into white  
sheets. Printed pink roses and faded green leaves,  
her pastel pink blanket, crocheted, hand-made and desecrated.  
“What are you doing?”  
auburn hair, curled, shaking,  
her skin becoming veins, transparent.

As I stood from my sins, as I inhaled

the aura of store bought fragrance, the aura of age.

“Nothing Grandma,” I turned.

I walked out. I headed toward dollhouses,  
My Little Ponies and stuffed animals  
all in a row. I learned to lie.



## In Response

And I refused to hear unnecessary words, sounds,  
refused to listen when the calm turned to accusation,  
the audacity that you knew what she needed.  
She slept before your tongue pushed its way through.  
That voice reached the ceiling and she saw a war in your eyes  
when you told me leave.

I do not apologize for my lack of introductions,  
just as he never apologized for calling me a cunt.

You avoided words as electrons clustered  
above my window through the crack that fit your fist,  
reaching for me.  
And you turned the key.  
Two lights that could have promised me to you; blinding  
as I drove down empty streets, streets where millions of her lay  
in their beds.

I asked, *can you stop,*  
You replied, *I've given up everything.*

Two days from now wet earth's stench will rise.  
The sun will shine on my left as I drive away  
as I find myself not in tears.

## The Current

Your jeans sit too low and your rage is wind.  
Strong as debris, fists, and arms hurdle and crash into my drivers seat window,  
into my clutch, my hands. My key flies to the space below your feet.  
Your hair is balding, old like a molester of children  
and the tattoo, that skeleton key of metal and blood,  
does nothing, reminds you that--

I never orgasmed with you.  
Never knew love with him,  
with you or anyone because he and you and they were not.  
I wanted the ability to walk on my own, to stand.  
Someone take me by the arm and lead me out into the open,  
a city where he doesn't exist.

Grit

Stains on the concrete sidewalk mimic  
palpitations-- frequent, scarce,

You: a muddy brown mixed with ashes and grit.  
The chairs are the same plastic,  
spotted and  
falling under weight.

But your body is no longer here.  
Your body has faded,  
just walked away, vanished,  
like the marked spots on gravel washed  
away by pressure.

and it's also the smell of laundry

I want to smile, be happy  
with people and absent of thought

silent while the world carries on  
just proving that it can

1573 Quinn St

Spider carcasses on the shower floor and  
in the back room  
unfinished wood lies across  
an uneven table.  
Patchouli burned amidst pennies  
and colored stones  
with hand wraps and diagonal  
passions on the walls.

Red brick exterior off Quinn Street and  
lined with Swarovski crystal cabinets.  
News programs whispered the end  
of another day.

On the cobblestone driveway,  
“His and Hers” parking,  
curved to the left or straight in,  
mine behind,  
and blankets indulged in summer’s heat.

Out back the lake stood between  
nature and stone,  
an altar of our sins,  
(our potential never met?)  
with fishing poles, stuck  
three inches in the ground.  
Spiderman or professional  
but the choice was always yours.

Cigarette butts, firm but giving  
from constant drags,  
flicked across a cracked shoreline  
with silence or laughter as  
the breeze brought rain,  
brought Fall.

You stand (contemplating?), and hard,  
with meaning, my hand twitching,  
my heart slowing to a stop  
on twisted metal.

Triggered and Triggering, this Enflamed City

Holy Crusade they call it,  
the name filled with justice, grace. Just enough  
to be valid, to mask or give reason  
to the boy in the crib, the girl in the corner  
to the ashes with shards and singed edges  
of clothing. Burnt flesh of mothers or fathers,  
suffocation in noses.

They bite, they cut, they bleed blood that pours,  
sharpens senses or paralyzes and seeps  
into earth, into dirt, into wet soaked with red.

These eyes of mud and power ruin ears,  
tongues from mouths and throats  
that beg on knees, that kiss or spit, spew  
and prepare for battle. They believe

their truth, preach their verses, and follow  
this man with snarled hair and downcast eyes,  
head bowed, not wanting to see his doing.

Heritage (part i)

-- *Wade (1915 – 1992)*

I believe he called her princess, *Come here honey, closer.*  
And she won't tell me the rest.  
She gasps for air  
as he rocks and rocks and rocks.

She won't tell me the rest,  
how he crawled into cotton sheets,  
rocks, rocked,  
kissed her neck as she turned her head, stared.

He crawls into sheets  
and the overhead fan whirs on.  
He kisses her neck as she turns her head and stares,  
as the sweat dries.

The overhead fan whirs  
as she gasps for air.  
The sweat dries.  
I believe he called her princess, *Come here honey, closer.*

Heritage (part ii)  
-- *HRM*

And she gasps for air  
as he rocks and  
rocks and rocks.

There is silence

when it's over, when the sweat dries.  
There is the whir  
of the overhead fan,

the white and gray one I know.



There is No Window

Like an abuse victim, we are twins  
and sheltered.  
Odds are you won this game, will win again  
and shelter  
that, it, her, the lucky one. Receiver  
of you/your.  
Lucky is lose there and they call it survival.

Funny that I've been spit on, nearly killed  
--red, orange, blue, purple--  
and you stuck with me,  
your words, lack of them.

Sweat on skin, faint scent of Curve Soul fingertips.  
You're covered in hair, but barely.  
Your body pregnant,  
a million specimens badly wasted.  
There is no champion here as we count our losses  
on fingers that wrinkle and ripple that longed to be touched  
at one point, that repeatedly crack,  
a tribute to the abuser.

Did you know I remembered that night?

The change of atmosphere, consciousness  
and red bricks, brown speckles, grout half emptied  
in its criss-cross pattern where ants work  
in lines, worked  
day in day out, back and forth. Your words

are thin, not forced, maybe.  
Overlapping and evaporate into pounding  
sound waves; my outward silence.  
*I almost did that day and something stopped me.*  
*I need this, this space, to find the culprit,*  
and you spoke like this.

Criss-cross applesauce on the floor while I inhaled  
hot air, separated by fabric from the outside. Captivity?  
I'm sure the air was stale  
or burnt or shallow,

(Was it the same for you? They call it scars  
or wounds and I refused the title, believed  
my Savior, our Savior, Saving Grace.)

and the earth and lake are wet  
and water has no iron stench, has no  
need for purifying. There is no resemblance to me, here,  
by the screen and its spider thin cloth.

333 Melody Estates, The First Week

This is her and he is sleeping  
and she smokes too many cigarettes while the wind blows.  
A chair full of rain water and ashes.  
She realizes that she has him is scared of him and frightened  
because the wants or needs and habits etched into her skin  
sometimes last till sunrise.

You are different because you stayed.  
You are new and welcome with your  
sometimes gray or cadet or aqua, your  
inviting sweat and scratch, your  
rough as she pulls his head deeper with her hands, no air.

She has been a victim but hates to acknowledge it.  
She has called the others rapists and worse.  
She has scars and marks for days, let's call it years.  
And then he came

and she backs away. He takes a step  
and she counters;  
that perfect play he saw last night on ESPN, MLB, NFL  
something, when the door was closed with the TV on.

You don't stop your pleads for calm when the girl is sobbing,  
he does not flinch  
at eyes covered in wet and black flakes pouring,  
in past that reads like this when it rears its head.  
The Dobermans in black and deep brown from behind the metal gate of her child hood.  
He stays

and she stares in fixation or confusion,  
a million fractures evoking syllables,  
1 and four letters, C-U-...  
but instead 1,1,1 or 1,4,3.  
Seven letters, three  
spaces that don't make sense, that are  
constant. And she kneels

flows and up heaves her daily disorder,  
the one her body cannot handle because she was born without.

She adjusts and finds his hand,

solid leg and body already waiting  
for her in the room where the lights are dark.

Reflections on Readings, on Juarez, on Chihuahua, on Things I Do Not Know  
*--after Valerie Martinez's Each and Her*

If I understand correctly they used force  
and dark shades turn to winter tones on skin, like costumes.  
Blade and powder after organs and ropes, signature.  
This is all they know.  
(but she) speaks softly, translates for us.

The rising, the blockage in your throat,  
and a list of names. The names  
that bring reality, force recognition, 'humanization' you said,  
"What keeps the murderers from murdering."

They call this tragic, unknown. These murders  
and losses. These girls and women, "this way"  
you say, but don't know where to direct these masses,  
these people who call this an outbreak.  
Outbreak? Epidemic? They call this unheard of  
and mysterious like a magic trick with no beginning or end.  
But this is dinner at 7 PM and the sun setting  
over aqua, over red flat dust, over an abundance of white, cold.  
This is everywhere.  
This is Monday meatloaf, Tuesday chili, Wednesday stew,  
Thursday leftovers. On Friday it is pizza with pepperoni.  
This is every day and routine,  
these parties and desires, and this is  
tradition, so where are your tears?

## Sensing Sand

The fence between us is cold to the touch  
after a brief rain washes off the chalk  
landscape of yesterday. It stands in yellow peach  
sand with drying weeds, flowers.  
My skin is hot and sweat pours down my neck  
as the sun beats below to green clusters and dust  
covered mountains they call hills because they haven't grown enough.  
And I stare beyond Algae's and Alfie's house,  
the family of boys shot one day after lunch.  
Osie calls my sister's name and here I am  
still tied to the fence, hands behind my back  
and fastened with pink string connected  
to the plastic diamond that today is a black-iron ball and chain.  
Yesterday, pirates gold. And my toes sink,  
slide into grit that holds the fence, buried so deep  
its roots cannot feel this heat that burns  
down on its sister limbs, my wrists.  
The necklace around my wrists is tightly knotted,  
faded in spots from dirt on days when we are gypsies, kings.

My neighbor Osie's hair is black and sticks up straight, reminds me of electricity and the story  
my dad would tell every day before we went outside, those two brothers that stood on our fence,  
that touched the telephone wires and fell down, one lived because the pine needles jump started  
his heart, one didn't.

Our parents barely speak, and I think, how can it stand up like that, stand up in this heat.

## The Mechanics of a Clothes Pin

When you are one we live with my parents, we don't use cloth diapers, bottle warmers, there is just enough for Wal-Mart brand and coloring books, just enough for us to make a haven in the living room. The carpet beneath us is cadet blue, curly-que stitch, not padded enough except to break your falls that are constant because your legs are new, it is covered by pink and white sheets with pillows stuffed between walkways, between the yellow, blue, yellow, blue, gray couch in stripes, serving as gates and trapping us in this tiny prison filled with blocks and color crayons. I'm sorry we could not afford Crayola, Tickle Me Pink.

The couch is a mountain you only climb when no one is here, when I step into my room for a quick call or for a cigarette out front, three minutes of peace in my day. There are no blinds on the window as I stare in after you; the sun puts shadows on your face, the usual gold, blue, and carnation pink, muted. With little hands turning every which way, determined to understand.

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