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THE GASOLINE TREE

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2013

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Terry Thaxton

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ABSTRACT

In exploration of Millennial anxieties and the power of dreaming, *The Gasoline Tree* imagines a soundtrack for the revelations, defeats, and curiosities of leaving childhood behind. This is a collection of 40 poems that examines eating disorders, gender roles, physical abuse, sex, infidelity, loneliness, and the fear of losing one's parents. This collection also contemplates the brutalities and muted delights of what drives us all: love, in all of its forms. "The Gasoline Tree," "Wolf of Chocorua," and many other poems construct New England landscapes that pay homage to the pastoral uniqueness of Maxine Kumin and Galway Kinnell, while poems in the latter half of the collection, such as "Home Alone" and "Little Big Econ," rouse depictions of southern environments and intensify the narrator's budding sense of displacement. There are many voices within, but there are three particular voices that can be heard above the rest: the child struggles with the complexities of divorce and identity; the young woman struggles with the complexities of remorse and relationships; the woman struggles with reminiscence and loss. Yet, each voice works toward expressions of awareness and acceptance of the enduring captivation with impermanence and consequence in a disposition influenced by W.S. Merwin, Anne Sexton, Kay Ryan, and Louise Glück. Whether driving by a homeless man, staring at the ceiling fan, or lying awake late into the night, this collection examines the transient nature of everyday occurrences and the buried meanings that might govern them all.

For my family and Joshua Rees.

Special thanks to Terry Thaxton and Don Stap.

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I am grateful to the editors of the following publications in which these poems first appeared (in a different version) or are forthcoming:

Blue Monday Review: “Blind Tomorrow”

DeadBeats: “My Morning Moments”

Yellow Chair Review: “The Gasoline Tree”

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Blind Tomorrow

I wish most to see the lilacs
from when I was seven, soak
pure dendritic oils
into my irises and scale walls
of purple or lilac, its own color.
So signature, so definite,
like nothing in this world.
Tomorrow, I am blind.
Today, I know not what I see.
I know the molasses man dressed
in brown pants and a brown, baggy
shirt with a brown sweatshirt tied loosely
around his waist who waits at the corner
of buy-here-pay-here and gasoline,
dreadlocks past his ass
and no cash,
but he never asks.

I know midnight stray cats,
always black,
that look on with yellow
or green coloboma eyes long enough
for you to start toward them before
they spook and dart to nearby bushes,
leaving me sad and also happy.
They were never mine
and they don't have to be.

I know blueberries, not blue
like you buy but purple-crimson
like the western sun folding into mountains
and into someone else's sky.

If I am blind tomorrow,
take my idle tears
and bury them with the flint corn,
the pomegranate juices, the narrow, fading
orange groves, and the redwood dusk flecks
dancing through those crown glass windows.

Moment of Weightlessness

“I don't want to know what time it is.
I don't want to know what day it is or where I am.
None of that matters.”
-Christopher McCandless

I was born wandering into fields,
forests, nameless crowds, and the moment
of weightlessness before a swing
starts its pendulum plunge.

Imagining death and the end
of the world, I woke screaming
each night. Pastor came for dinner,
spoke, tried to console. He died
soon thereafter, thrown aside
by the congregation
like a bumbling pariah,
plagued by intangible loss.
I can't remember
what he might have said.

As I drew first breaths,
a young American drifter drew
his last through pained lungs
and decay after weeks
of fatigue, hunger, Alaskan poison.
They identified him weeks later,
but it only took hours
to identify me, my parents
offering a name like an utterance
of good faith.
We have supplied.
We have done our part.
Now we wait.

Follies

A bead of sweat glided swiftly down
my temple, as if its mother
had called it home.

I looked up at my mother,
her striking profile so circumspect,
crystal blue eyes now pressed and stale.

I followed her gaze to the field,
the wind corralling each cluster
of golden waves into waltz.

My hand fumbled its way through the air
like a blind foal searching for milk,
and I dug my fingers through her clenched fists,

finding my place in her presence.
I searched her face and for the words
to tell her that I was there.

This was her *way*:
calloused by the world
and still always so exquisite.

So lovely I wanted to shake her
and wake her,
but she was never truly sleeping.

Walking through the city,

I remember how my knees ached
on the bathroom floor,
my face became one
with the bathroom carpet,
tears glided
to their garden
of threads,
and my throat burned
with self-loathing fury.
My mother knocked
and asked in subdued alarm
if everything was *okay*.

Walking through the city
is like walking on coals,
spoons of devilish fiends
call to my bursting, insatiable hunger
with perfumes of palatability.

Walking through the city,
I forget a girl
contented and fulfilled,
body borne
of her beautiful mother's womb,
hoping to grow up as equally striking.

Walking through the city,
I pass by a window and gaze
at a reflection of nothing,
my impression of me.

Incontinence

Time begins and ends with Velcro
shoes. Mine were sparkly blue
and glowed when I pranced

down hallways to water fountains
or lined up in tactical formations
for Recess War.

In first grade Spanish class,
the Fire Chief's son kept whispering *baño*
and I couldn't stop giggling.

Urine trickled through my corduroy pants
and pattered onto a spotted floor tile.
Mom later asked my teacher if peeing was punishable.

*I'll pee right now,
and what could you do?
She's a child.*

Mom taught there before she met
Dad in the teacher's lounge
and braved another marriage.

I peed until their blighting divorce,
when all laughter was lye
on unsullied skin.

I sunk into an oversized, brown leather
chair as a mousy woman disclosed
how well I was *handling change*.

I longed to sink farther, to disappear into memory
of parents fighting, surviving together
because I was a child.

Departure from Loneliness

She hasn't burned since childhood,
fishing for crabs from the Ogunquit channel
with hotel dental floss and bits of lobster.

The yellowed splay of thorny stalks
never dies but is instead forced
from home to home, banished
to the far corners of patios
or windowsills in guest rooms,
like a mutt purchased to fill the void
of childless corridors
or cold, barren sheets,
never to be heard or seen.

They say plants thrive on music,
so she sets it on the piano
once a week while she keys Chopin,
but it remains yellow and sad,
like a hospital patient waiting
to be moved to a new room,
a new wing,
for new or lack of progress.

Having the aloe on hand means
more than healing:
ownership,
a departure from loneliness
when she's never heard or seen.

Les Froids

As Jean Valjean's double sways
upon the precipice of martyred ships,
I pop another orange square
into my mouth, soak the salt
into my saliva, and dissolve
the cracker into a million factions
of French liberties.

Live free or die we advertise
here in the Granite State.
The mountain air is as freeing
as a watery descent into lake water,
still cold well into spring. I don't speak
languages of servitude, conceptualize
calculations of oppression.

I feel the plunging night temperatures
but also autonomy in this arctic
as snow falls in France,
on faux Jean Valjean's bloodied brow,
on the timbre of his longing.

My Father

You lay with me before bedtime
and listened as I read stories aloud.

You sang "Daddy's Little Girl"
like you were Al Martino, but greater.

You tucked both daughters in tight,
and I could hear your heavy hand stirring
embers in the woodstove downstairs,
begging them to blaze on midwinter nights.

You stood outside in the driveway,
commanding us to have wonderful days,
barefoot in morning dew,
and we begged you to go inside
before anyone on the bus saw
your pale, pale ankles.

You packed lunch in a brown paper bag,
after Mom couldn't stay,
and drove me to school every morning.

You smiled and acted ordinary,
even with our domestic illusions
rotting all around us,
like dilapidated factories in a dejected town
or the leaves on our maple tree
that I'd lovingly watered with gasoline.

The Gasoline Tree

Put your weeping to bed, little tree.
Your long-fingered branches
comfort and terrify me,
gently gesticulating a sleep ritual,
as I scan moonlit clouds
beyond Patty Bradley's property.
I see you as mine and agree to water you.
The old red canister will do.

We never owned the field
Across Route 107, but it is mine
and the closest I've been to standing
in it is when I fetch the mail
from our battered steel box or imagine I am one
of its July lightning bugs hovering
just above the aurulent reeds, waiting
for August's plea to vanish entirely.

The boulder at the edge of the woods
is as good a chair as any—a throne
to royal ideas that none of the bobwhites,
or finches, or meadowlarks can peck
holes in. The world is my cheese,
ripening quickly and furiously but full of voids.
I cannot take this with me—a home stone
in the pocket of a young heart set ablaze.

Do I love butter, dandelion?
Shine golden against my throat and give me sweet
words to say before I pop off your head
and toss your stem. No burials or tears,
just years of quiet cruelty,
like afternoons spent watering my little tree
with the old red canister. So much love and care
and pain. It won't stretch. It won't bloom.

We press flower petals between the crisp
pages of favorite books, hoping they're rediscovered
years later between even crisper pages,

crystallizing reveries from the near
and slowly sobering shadows.
Dad will cut you down this autumn, little tree,
after twenty years of my watering you.
Yet, I can't fit you between pages filled by my ink.

Fish from Heaven

Imagine being scooped up
into a waterspout
and then raining on Yoro—
an existence so small
that God can displace you
without lifting a finger.

What does a fish dream of?
Does it feel any pain?

Is it joyous
at the peak of its ascent?

SE 14th Avenue Evenings

Our seventeen-year-old phantoms remember the nights
your eyes turned to razorblades that sliced
moral blemishes into our hides and butchered
innocence we believed you capable of while siphoning
Four Loko into your jaded veins.

Your mother kept a leather-bound collection
of her religious machinations,
and you stole it to read to us late at night
as you danced in the velvet of the underground
and to Nico's hollow voice.

You asked if you were beautiful.

What did we learn from prying?
From your birth, your mother wanted
you to be her little girl. Your family sat
in practiced silence as you struggled

with who you were and who She raised
you to be—a boy without
a boy's or girl's soul. Maybe
no soul at all. But we still remember the nights
you were beautiful.

Bathtub Memoir

The smoke from my cigarette billows to the ceiling above,
a ceiling so white that I forget where I am.

I abandon my watery world, rise,
and rest my head upon the bathtub's curve.

I take a drag and feel my insides rattle with displeasure.
This ceiling reminds me of every other ceiling

I stared at while lying in every other bathtub
I laid in since the beginning of time.

As I lie here, so naked, so au naturel, I can recall
each important place I took a bath—

disheartened by a boy of Baglione design
and muddled by wine in a concrete tropic;

willowy and patient, floating sleep
yearning for felicity of extinction;

famished and ashen and holding breath
to a metronome of loathing.

I've never felt less alone
in absolute silence.

Never the Face

Her smile fades
and ambles into boondocks
of euphoria forgotten:
sand beneath her feet,
the steady torrents
of brackish wind,
and the red walls,
her eyelids.

She lies—
invents modest histories
of her body.
The fervor of my hands
disgust but also quiet her.
Never the face.
Maybe one day,
the throat.

She only ever felt alive
as she watched the stars
from the roof
of her mother's
rental home,
a decaying
yellow bastion
of silence and growth.
When I strike,
she cries.

Cause and effect.

I am this way because I choose to be.
She is this way because she feels she has no choice.

I love her.
I think I do.
I will strike until I know for certain.

An Almost Ex-lover

We sit on a slanting sidewalk, pressed
against cold cast iron chairs. I used to like
the stubble on your face and neck.

There is laughter from a table close by—
a cluster of teenage girls gawking
at a ballet of begging homeless men.
A mother shrieks, mortified
that her cherub, with snot dripping
down over his pouting lips,
wiped his nose all over her Prada coat.
In the distance, a careless homemaker
receives a parking ticket from a bicycle cop
with a mullet. In the midst

of all that, you are smoking a clove cigarette,
hiding beneath a pair of black sunglasses.
In between the drags, your chapped lips quiver.

You know the sting of your hands.
You know my terrain.
But how could you know
that while people are bustling
around downtown Ocala,
I'm preparing all the ways
I might tell you I don't love you anymore.

Kissing Rock

I let Sam take my hand and pull me toward the spot
by the river, where generations of kids lost

kissing virginites and prayed
that they were improving. He drew white rose petals

from his pocket and decorated the rock with silent
confidence, in rhythm with the hum of the surf.

Closing my eyes, I was standing on a precipice
of the Mediterranean, flittering my fingers back and forth,

tracing blended blues of sea and sky,
until Sam slid his fingers between mine

and we became one. He guided me to his monument,
and grazed my collar bones with calloused thumbs.

If someone saw us, they would think he was strangling me.
I thought about my sister and the rope burns around her neck.

She lay before me, unmoving, costumed in her favorite dress
and our mother's loveliest lipstick that we stole

for occasions such as these, with boys and kissing and wanting
to seem beautiful to someone apart from the man in the sky.

I let Sam dig his hands beneath the shoulders of my shirt
and skim the curve of my breasts, ribs, navel, and down,

down, down past the waistline of my jeans,
so he could feel the warmth of my skin,

like a candle trapped in a mason jar, vigilant, assuming
to feel something at last

for the both of us.

My Moments in the Morning

I always wake far earlier than you.
The sun gleams down onto my naked face

as if I were a child again, taking a forced nap with my mother.
You hold me against you like a prisoner.

Your warmth is far different than my mother's though—
her embrace a stifling womb.

I cannot leave or even stir, for fear of waking you
and losing these precious moments to myself.

I match your breath's pace and watch
your body inhale the air around us.

When, finally, that moment arrives
and your dream takes its final bow,

the audience raves and howls,
and your lips form a smile,

I'm not afraid to kiss you
and remind you that I'm here.

Staring into the Sun

I'm perched on the sill of my bedroom's
open window and I throw myself out
and up into the air, flap my arms
as if I've done this before, and soar higher
and higher, above the farmhouse
the chicken coop, the goats' pen
and the patch of prickly bushes
I called Death Valley when I was five.

I'm a marionette carried by optimism's strings,
suspended in a bowl of Mother's marmalade.

The way the wind hits my face
feels as if I'm driving down dirt roads
in Brother's Jeep with all four windows down.

I see the land like a satellite.
Sister hangs clothes on the line
and Father clears bamboo stalks
from the path leading down to the garden.

I stare into the sun for seconds or months and forget
that I could fall and break.

I did a lot of things

before you knew me, like crawl on the sandy floors of playgrounds
as if I were a lion. I trick-or-treated in neighborhoods of folks

that knew my folks before I was born, cloaked by a black hand-me-down
grim reaper veil. A friend and I made a pact to start wearing thongs

in the fourth grade. I sang the National Anthem at junior high
basketball games and baked in hot tubs at houses of the most popular

girls in school. I got cable television for the first time in my life,
and then my life didn't belong to me anymore—it belonged

to conformity of manufactured ripped jeans and the desperation
of wannabes and asses shaking in depraved music videos.

Three different high schools meant three new first impressions.
The third first impression: I knew things about things

and wore thrifted clothing. I cut my own bangs and I smoked like a flue.
I drank beer on my mother's rooftop, and stole vodka while tending

a man's four dogs. I played Bob Dylan on the piano and danced
to the Velvet Underground. I wrote poems that didn't mean anything

and flirted with boys that didn't mean anything. When I stumbled
upon a boy who did mean something, we moved away and in together.

We processed photography. We watched *Golden Girls*. We made love
on a futon mattress. I watched his genius turn to confusion.

I watched his passion turn to ferocity. When money ran out,
I got a job, which led to a better job and a distraction. I liked work

better than home, because *you* were there and *you* didn't hit me.
But now when I wake up earlier than you, and I look

upon your peaceful face, I realize you never ask about who I was
or what I did. You never ask anything at all.

I can't take any of it back.

Tending Us

I follow the trail
of decaying coffee cups,
empty now but still tinged
by dark lines, evidence
that you abandoned them.

They lead me to the ashtrays,
seething with cigarettes, still smoking.

The wind outside sways the trees
into clusters of golden waves.
Murky vultures circle the remains
of my garden—the only favor
I asked of you before:
to rake
to water
to love, as you can.

You inquire about my day
and then ignore my answer.

What happened to my garden?
Your face, sallow and bitter,
turns toward me to laugh—
the kind of laugh
that strips paint off walls
or rouses the wasps
from their dark, dusty dungeons.
Your hands slacken to reveal
your palms,
cracked and withered by black soil.

Did you try to save my garden,
once thriving with jasmine and myrtle,
and fragrant like the newly wrought
life of a babe, honeyed and fresh,
 (are you)
unable to do anything?

Sharing Seattle Silence with a Married Man

They sit beneath the red umbrella,
basking in the Pacific breeze that dances up
the street from the harbor, where ferries
and water taxis bustle to and fro. From there,
they can admire the dilapidated factory
across the way, covered in ivy
and now home to liquor store fronts
and thrift bonanzas. The breeze is an aromatic blend
of pad thai and salon chemicals.

She is happy, resting between the cruel stillness
of anticipative air and the soothing steam
from Jack's cappuccino. School children
toddle down the street below,
meandering puddles from fresh rain like little soldiers,
and she studies the multitude of their galoshes—
baby blue, candy red, butterscotch yellow, daisy petals.

Then shame hammers her hard, like the shade of green
in his eyes or the slicing pain in lungs as legs kick and kick
upward to the surface. He's the breath that suffocates her.

But the shame is silent, like their world, like muted
screams of sadness or ecstasy, like the flames that bite
her thighs, like ambient static. So long as she is silent,
he will stay.

Driving Alone

There was a woman who lived in woods by Sawyer Lake.
You felt her nimble feet flowing over thicket
each morning to thumb down cars on the crook in Route 107,
a few hundred feet from the mailbox.

You asked your mother to pull over, again
and again and again. Somedays, she had time.
Somedays, the woman had already hitched
and you wondered where she was headed
or if the man who picked her up was kind.
Did he have nice things to say?

You are a woman now.
You pass a plant nursery
on the corner of Slavia and 426
when you see a man sheathed in tarp
riding past you on a bicycle in the rain.
He's the oldest thing you've seen.
No more than forty.

You shiver at the thought of him
sitting next to you and sharing
the trapped air in your little car,
almost as trapped as you feel
driving alone, no one to remind you
being kind isn't so difficult.

Home Alone

Hydrangeas dance at the corner
of the driveway,

illuminated alone by glow
of waning moon.

The rain has stopped
for now—

cicada canticles, the sizzle of solitary
cigarette blaze.

Another night at home
without you.

Not missing you gets
easier.

Vacancy

Last night I saw a face
above me, hovering,
haunting, uninhabited.

The breath had vanished,
flew out the window
into the still silence of night.

The eyes belonging to the face
stared, beseeching me to scream
so they could retreat
into the dismaying darkness
of the space around us.

I lie in breathlessness,
sadness,
newfound emptiness too,
because there was a time
when those eyes looked on in love
and rolled back into their sockets
in saluted ecstasy.

Zipless Fuck

I find myself wandering
into dangerous territory:
the possibility
that two people
found each other
at the wrong moment,
the wrong place.

The façade of devotion
that's been passed
down from mother to daughter
and so on and so forth
starts to slip its claws
beneath my pale sheen,
tears my limbs like rags.

We are unkind to those whose breaths
rattle next to us while we roll,
farther from sleep
than if we struck up the curtains,
the tape, the paper,
and realized the soil outside
is merely mud.

We can't go on much longer,
pretending to be less than who we are:
broken sweethearts who sleep apart.

Bring Me Back

Beyond that curtain of trees,
we followed a brook as if it might lead
us somewhere else and listened
to birds through bonnets from before our time.

Beneath that pond, in winter, do the toads
sleep or cuddle up to their mothers, waiting
to bubble up to the surface again in spring
and lay eggs near the banks beneath the bowing birches?

Behind that bedroom door, we spoke
to Barbie dolls and braided hair
before we knew what boys were like
or the many ways we would bloom.

Bring me back to those days,
and we can burn the evidence
of who we've become and better remember
what it was to be free.

Trust Them

I hope you can forgive them, my sweet sister,
the man who broke your mother's heart

and the man who's breaking yours.
They are the same and they are not.

They speak in silver tongues we hear on the crags
of honeyed nightmares. I've seen them here at your guileless dwelling,

roaring, mauling, mourning, rotting. He's nothing
without you. But with you, what is he?

I hope you can trust them, my sweet sister, the man
who crawls down grey beaches to greyer jetties

and the man who misses you, plagues you, begs you.
They watch with baited eyes,

and even you cannot save them from those wanton webs.
Expect nothing and you will be happy. I'm sorry, but trust me.

Raccoon Song

Fatted on eggs
of indecision and trust,
I forage the consecrated eye
of progress and shelter,
pluck young insects
from dank bastions,
devour for fuel,
open all latches,
stalk the sluggish
and feeble, prevail.
I gorge and cubs wake
whining and chattering
like children in a lake.
I am alone and fending
another night—
my miniatures might
open their eyes
and welcome
my kind of darkness.

Sitting with Mother

There must have been a time in your life
when you wanted to be happy.
Maybe before children, divorce, or self-pity.

You hung the clothes on lines beside the driveway
and sang old Christian songs.
The malnourished goats were due to die,

so you wrapped them in blankets and cradled them to sleep.
You stayed up all night. They did die, but not in vain...
You sat in your bed during thunderstorms, waiting

for each *clap* and each *bang* and held me tight
against your body's feigned warmth. We shivered
beneath blankets of wool and cotton. The coldness went deep,

deeper than I knew then. You sight-read old hymns
from your father's collection: odes to angels,
repentance, and joy. As you painted with oil,

brushes scattered about the den—a metropolis
of books, bills, and banished antiques—
I never made a sound, watching you.

You smoked outside, submitted yourself to the will
of a drag. I begged you to quit until I was twelve.
Four years later, you begged me.

Fanatics

I shout *pussy* at the top of my lungs,
at a grown man
in cleats and a jersey who earns
four times my salary,
at fans from my town, and to a woman
standing twenty feet below me.
I feel a warm rush of blood breach
face, a mysterious squib erupt from ribs,
and then immediate anguish.

I pollinate *pussy*. I rob
that woman for five whole minutes
as she stares at me with a pain
teachers or mothers feel, that my
teacher-mother felt
when I stole money
from her purse for cigarettes,
drank on the roof above her bedroom,
and judged her for judging Dad.

The woman imagines words.
She doesn't say them.
I say them and measure the weight
of their extracts—
a pinch of *bitch* and a dash of *fuck*,
mostly while sitting in traffic.

I take my seat, scan the surrounding rows of friends
in the visiting section of Orlando's stadium.
I judge myself for eternity.
Her face is soon gone.

Sandwich Generation

At the base of the toilet,
she can hear Rosie's favorite cartoons
and a blender running in the kitchen,
Cindy brewing the daily mix
of medicine and sewage.
All of this vomiting and static,
never dying but stuck in this state
of Pain in the Ass and Help me Bathe
or useless blob of Grey and Wrinkles.

She stopped saying Thank You
because of the look on her son-in-law's face,
reminders of the money spent
on medical bills instead of investing
in Rosie's future.

She dreams of the night in which
she Falls Asleep,
ridding them of their burdens
and, she hopes, the memories of her like This.

Reel

I wish
we could fast
forward sometimes
like we did with VHS tapes
when we were young,
forcing tape
around a reel
without thought
that it might all go away
someday.
Everything does.

I didn't know
you existed
while I sunbathed
on the roof
of my family's powder blue
Voyager, speckled
by Sun-In and smelling
of calendula,
hoping
to hook the palate
of someone
half as beautiful
as you are.

I think of the girls
who danced
at the edge
of your stage,
who tiptoed
across fallen trees
while firmly holding
your hand,
who stared
at you from across
workshop circles,
who thawed
into you under

flannel sheets,
ebbing squeaks
of a cheap bed frame.

If I didn't know
you existed,
how can I feel
betrayed by a lifetime
of love and unearthing?
You were as muddled
as I was and soaring
while the going was good.

What did you dream of?
Surely not this.

Ghost House

Haven between the ghetto and mansions,
We know your floors, solid but bowing
like centennial splinters, and your resonant moans
from the weight of lovers, like caked twigs
of a sociable weaver's dwelling.

We know your chambers.

We bleed in them, sweat in them,
cry in them, die in them
over daily calamities.

We sometimes lose
who we are in them.

We line your insides with luxurious skillets,
soaps, lamps, paints, four-legged things;
lie against the grain of your cypress planks
wondering how we're meant to survive
or provide and also
realize our blessings.

No room is safe from darkness.

We feel imminent doubt lurking
in the corners of your high ceilings.

We've become the ghosts
we feel within your plaster walls,
fingering chalked bows of perdu cellos
as Florida rain strokes your pleated shingles.

Please Lock the Door

Raise my golden head
and fill it with lies
of tomorrow's Carolina majesties.
The whimpering in your sleep
means little more than yesterday.
But your eyes, as firm as the wood you gouge,
seize me. I stop here,
where I've seen this self before.

Clench my weary hands
and lead me to tonic wildness, forests.
In each face, I see a lover and wonder
why he came to be lost and wandering,
gone now from the glow of my pumped-up moon
and beaten to pulp of foul inventions.
And this? You? I stop here,
where I've seen this self before.

Kiss my coward brow and hold off the indigo
currents I drown in each time.
Put a dollar in this pocket
each day you stay,
and we'll earn a part-time salary
from lovemaking, inevitable heartaches,
and joy as hurried as wind. I stop here,
where I've seen this self before.

Please lock the door, keep me.

Little Big Econ

The sand sits hot, a biting white steam that burns
Huxley's paws and we quicken our strides
to relieve him, to reach the shrinking shadows
of nearby cabbage palms and magnolia trees.

It is quiet quiet quiet when we are the only souls
on the trailhead. We have no maps.
I've been here before, once,
and I half-remember this wraithlike wasteland

of skeleton trees, their limbs breaking and bending
in all directions. No sanctuary from the sun.
I see you ahead of me and I see your visceral
misery—to be in silence except for the silky crunching

of cigarette sand under our boots and Huxley's panting.
You reach this lime-green, white steam tropic desert,
nothing like the lush canopies and limestone caves of Oxford.
We cross under oaks and pines and we breathe again.

The mountain bike trails seem promising,
and we meet a skinny stream of the Little Econ.
The pup baptizes himself and then soothes
his callused paws beneath the sterling current.

I wonder if our parents felt this way
when they were lost but found
in new ways on the wings of hard work
and sacrifice sacrifice. This forest demands.

The departure from worry leaves us
uneasy, and it is so quiet quiet quiet
when we are alone but also in love and attempting
to afford securities even in this wilderness.

The Ceiling Fan that Cools Us

I have ripened far beyond the budding palate
for Mother's milk—lips pressed
instead to those of a lover
who forces me to consider
not only sensations of wind,
blinding sun specks
skirting Lake Dora waves,
or crow's feet folding
during thunderous laughter,
but also the desolation in death—
the visual of his expired eyes gazing
up at the ceiling fan that cools us both
in July evenings for decades.

I consider the way tight skin meets skin
surrenders to the inevitable truths of empty
bedsheets and unblemished pillows.

I consider the way matched breaths rise and sink
surrenders to the howling of dogs
left out after owners retire to dreaming.

Cyber Footprints

I typed your names into Google today,
but there was nothing.
No swimming glories
or articles about the beautiful houses
you built and help build.
No oil masterpieces of your vivid
Florida landscapes under the tutelage of Backus
or tennis accolades from Plymouth State.
No reports of your marriage
or your divorce.
Not your boob-tube article in the *Laconia Citizen*
or your reign as president
of the Gilmanton Youth Organization.
No mention of your 20-foot fall
from the pear tree in our backyard
or championship seasons during your stint
as girls' softball coach.

I'll have children soon.
They'll have my cultural diatribes and testimonials.
They'll see me crowned as runner-up for Miss Hibiscus.
They'll read poems I published in online journals.
Beyond scrapbooked photos
and the virtues you taught me,
I selfishly worry
we won't have enough of you.

Saturdays at Lake Baldwin Park

I assume that Huxley assumes
all car rides either lead to the park
or thousands of highway miles.
When we glide into place, I kill
the ignition and he cries in anticipation.
He hops from the sand-ridden backseat
of my car and pulls me
toward the closest entrance.
As I lift the first latch, he dances
and the white tresses of his tail flit quickly.
I lift the second latch and he is gone
as quickly as a gannet plunging
headfirst into water.

Most of the park is shaded
by tall oak and vast buttonwood trees,
all shrouded by Spanish moss that hangs
and rustles like party streamers
left out and abandoned
before a summertime storm.
Roots run and crawl beneath
the loose soil and sometimes jab out
above the surface,
forming a miniature but treacherous
mountain range to navigate.
Sparse grass gives way to sand
as I venture closer to the water.
The lake itself sometimes smells
of squandered eggs but also, somehow,
sweet like the tang
of a dying fruit tree.
When I close my eyes
and truly inhale,
it also smells of fresh rain.

Before I let him swim,
I exhaust a fraction of his energy.
With a curved plastic wand,
I heave a muddied tennis ball

with all my strength. He dashes
through the shadows
and his polychrome coat shines
in the flecks of sunlight filtering
through the top canopy.
People pass nearby
to walk on the short forest trails.
When he turns toward me,
ball in mouth, heaving
and also exultant,
he is ready to swim.

My favorite time to go
is in the late afternoon, when the wind
is still warm and the water is a myriad
of reds and oranges. Huxley meets me
in the clear shallow
after what seems like a lifetime of fetch.
Most days, even the swimming
won't tire him, but sometimes he'll visit me
while still smelling of mud,
lean his weight against my thigh,
and look out toward the water
as if searching for the sunset.
He lies down in the same place he stood,
contented by a few hours outside
and the companionship of something other
than two cats who can never understand him.

Wolf of Chocorua

I wade forward from the froth,
and return to forgotten lands.
A curse upon me, girl whose palms

know the coarse and biting hide
of bark throughout
Northern Hardwood forests.

Under the fragile strength of fledgling
wrists, I hoist myself into beech
and maple trees, surveying the field

behind the farm for hares or thrashers.
When the wind brakes,
I hear a soft chirrup from across the spread.

My father, blurred whistler,
stands in weakening sunlight,
waves to me, and smiles.

His sweet tune fades into bristling
wheat, dissolves golden into the awning
of my mourning.

I howl in midnight blackness,
rise, and wince from tenderness—
palms pricked and pink.

We Go to Weddings

We've arrived, my dear,
whatever that means.
Years before I knew your jade
eyes and years before I worked
to eat, I worked to leave home—
to spend the night
at Megan's house and build
forts from cotton sheets.
I went to houses. No
destinations. No
objectives. No
anxieties.

In whipped limelight,
I swallowed live music. Not the good
kind with lights and sound
quality that you brag
about to neighbors at the end
of the driveway, but the ones with feverish
youth finding their voices
at dingy cafes in coastal towns.
I went to shows. No
parties. No
sex. No
expectations.

Now is different.
We found each other
and we are suitable guests.
No plus ones. Just our names.
We are in our twenties
and everyone we know
is getting married, becoming
people we used to know.
We go to weddings. No
bonfires. No
board games. No
silly stuff.

In black suit and black dress,
we'll follow processions
and say little to one another
in the bitter chill of our car.
I'd much rather say we're battling
dehydration from all those divorce parties,
but we're each silently counting
to three: name, name, and pets' name. *Oh my.*
We'll go to funerals. No
jazz marches. No
pyre flames. No
rain dances.

We Laugh on Cold Nights

I stopped feeling my nose forty minutes ago
and the dog lies at your feet, kicking his own
in remembrance of time spent sprinting
under oak trees toward icy water, never
too cold for our herding, water-loving zealot.
Thirty-five degrees inside, forty outside—
the coldest January follows
the warmest December.

Your mind cascades, leaps between
the colors of dreams. I pull myself closer
to you like a woman journeying for warmth
from a village without kindling.
An hour earlier, we were laughing
about the empty pantry, the last glass
of chocolate milk, the overflow
of unwashed garments, the three blankets
tucked around us.
Six hours left before dawn.

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