The Wrong Place

by

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for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing

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This thesis is a regionally rooted, contrapuntal poetry cycle. I intend for it to unite my preoccupations with ecofeminist poetics and the genetic inheritance of fractured, grandmaternal generational lines, reconciling private and public conflicts by examining how political and geographical rupture, war zones, and genocide generate traumatic, ancestral memory. The granddaughter of Holocaust survivors and World War II veterans, my work will ask loud questions about why, for decades, depression has decorated the medical notes of my family, as if the ink stayed wet for a century, rubbing from one manila folder to the next. My project examines where these ancestral memories intersect, and manifest as cyclical bouts of anxiety and depression, physical illness, and disordered eating. By granting these recurring intergenerational cadences value in the present, my poems seek to transform stress, and the legacy of its gifts, into a greater consciousness. I hope my collection will join a canon of texts probing complicated cultural legacy, with an uncharted crispness in Canada.
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Toronto
come clean

“Vexation, and torment. Says that her mind forces her always to think of eating. Feels herself degraded by this. Has entirely, for the first time in years, stopped writing poetry.”

i

a sparrow clatters
to the patio

grubbed by the city
he remains white-cheeked
black-bibbed
wings hickory-brown
lap-cat tame

he inspects the cashew
centre-piece the hostess left
despite my

no
please
no food
menus a heaped totem

revolted by friends who
arriving late
forgot to eat first
superbly hot
sun bouncy-balls the sidewalk

a pug puffs audibly
on a lead

cyclists dismount
under a drumming
canopy of bees
rosemary and pin oak
drunk

children dingle in one and
two pieces from
monkey bars
awaiting the eternity of an
hour after eating
to swim

in a frozen yogurt spot
i try to
come clean

palms belly-up
beta-carotene yellow
but think better
of my order

return to the street
its applauding heat
to ma’am! miss!

my proposed cup
its contents
on the counter
congealing
i slit my skin
when shaving
my legs
mouths of blood
that won't shut up

absurdly early
on the subway platform
watching the train headlights
torch the tunnel
i unstick a plaster
it's been three days, i think
it's over

it jewels my ankle
bolts like lava
reddening my sock
i wonder
what mineral i'm missing
markham’s interlocking leaves
that tweenage hand trick
here’s the church here’s the steeple
a sugar, norway, silver, emerald queen maple
and tulip, redmond linden, hack-berry, horse chestnut
shubert choke cherry marquee

a willow drizzles to tarmac at harbord
the pong of a skunk-feast
a block below bloor
candy cane spatter
meat fly-amassed

not supposed to bike but I bike
the way my body overburns

around ramhorn handles
nails tipped maroon-shellac
all my rings are falling off my fingers
up always at six at the latest
apply hides of mascara
get out immediately

on the lawn surrounding the pool
a chorus of daisies
i allow myself a peach
let it dribble
from forearm to elbow

the cymbal-splash of swimmers
the trill of a starling’s wings in flight
clouds dilate northwest
sunbathers splay limbs like professionals
slant books to avoid tan lines
as if it was a sport

a woman i often see in the elevator
with veined kale sprouting from her corduroy tote
aligns herself in an arrow
dives deep and resurfaces
steadies herself on overlapping arms

in conversation at the lip of the pool
hair lacquered to her head
she wishes she was shorter
itemizes her female friends of preferable heights

and despite an irritating
uninterrupted discussion
about party cups
sun-warm cider and the procurement of ice
i stay
to prolong the time between waking and eating
my wine glass weeps
long legs slipping
swollen sides

only women
work here

glittered
leggy
modelesque
the cosmos of them
twinkling

dress hems severed
bottom-cheek short

i sausage-roll my scarf
onto the seat
a barrier stopping its
wooded slats from
digging in

the two-pronged pain
of my ilium pushing
through flesh

from behind
vertebrae knots
easily counted
above a backless dress
old friend
from out-of-town
asks to meet two hours
beyond my bedtime
it's been years

since i wore the weight of another woman
distributed evenly across my body

we drink
various wince-worthy somethings
on rocks
he's surprised
the street seems quiet for the city
stucco-starred sky
a handsome moon
cross-stitched by pine
its knitting-needle leaves

he pulls up a picture of his girlfriend
assures this is her
at her biggest
i wonder if he saves this
shoptalk
for me
at a party
in the bee-yellow jumper i sleep in
because dolling-up is an ordeal
— lied to, looks lovely
waffle-knit boxy over bones

i shoot vodka with ibuprofen
the sugar-coated cranberry-looking kind
ancestral eating and drinking i snicker

the oven hiccups
spring rolls onto a tray
grease-encrusted stalagmites
lime eighths film-over on the counter
a caucus of blundstones by the door

i discuss my maine coon’s imperatives
with another cat mum
his bizarrely tempting
human-grade chicken au jus
sulk on my coat before i
turn into a pumpkin at twelve

what’s a reasonable timeframe to be social?
i ask my uber driver
honest ed’s bulbs blur
through just-washed windows
palmerston coyly lamp-lit
the frump-frump of speed bumps
reminding my ribs
i over-downward-dogged
is half an hour enough?
the waitress grants
me immediate friendship

our accents
synthesized as other
by eavesdroppers
although to us
nothing alike

the honey locust listens
snaps its
lozenge-leaves

she’s irish
from cork
the auditorium of its harbour
whose sacred spaces
i sang in at their
international choral festival
during my teens
triskel christchurch
masonic hall
cathedral of st. mary
and st. anne

how our milky ways align
this her moonlight

by day
a receptionist at the
dance studio where I took
ballet, broadway, barre
before getting sick i say
scar tissue handcuffing
my esophagus
pulling taut

the real reason:
ashamed of seeing
my string-limbs
in wall-to-wall
floor-to-ceiling mirrors
in the too-cool clinic
furnished in sealskin velveteen
cleverly mirrorless—
price tagged privatization
mental health care
not immediately life threatening

my dietician asks for a list
*the pros and cons of staying sick*
marquise and asscher diamontes
tinkle from a lampshade
the strained exhalation of her computer on her desk
*for next time*

outside
queued boutiques of astounding specificity
epicurean dog treats
a millinery
ladies’ tunics in varying weights of linen

i sulk southbound
an irish setter holds her lead between her teeth
takes her human for a walk
bumbles over rotund paws
a bone bells from her red collar

i chip the thumb of my
wedgewood-blue manicure
panic
get it patched in the nearest salon
perfect again

in the black glass of an unopened bar
stools overturned on tables
the deep vs of my cheeks
sun-rosed shoulders and knees
muscles loose and stringy

i set up in a semicircular park
grass fanning from its bandstand
clover zigzagging their purple heads
shake my scarf into a blanket
pinch my belt into my belly
on a fresh page
underline *pros*
i am the skeleton
in the corner
an exhibition of bones
nursing the gunged leftovers of a cold
sniffing non-stop
how i always sneeze twice

i arrived as the creperie opened
to observe normalized eating
watched the sky drain
milk to peony to cornflower blue
stars snuffed
cherry blossom buds
loosening their fists

books stud the table
stamp-square
pages leafed
corners curling

my pencil fingers
peel an orange—
the satisfaction
of ripping pithy core
from flesh

the noisy business of breakfast
a little girl with a
centre part and plaits
dissects a pancake
oragamied into a triangle
rocket leaves licked with oil
a croissant
pillowy
overstuffed with almond
zigzagged with chocolate
while her mother
swats flakes from the bib of her dress
breakfast

french toast
pecan french toast
pecan cinnamon french toast
pecan cinnamon maple french toast
pecan cinnamon maple banana french toast
pecan cinnamon maple banana red berry french toast
pecan cinnamon maple banana red berry brioche french toast
pecan cinnamon maple banana red berry brioche creme brulee french toast
apple casserole vegan chocolate pumpkin challah french toast
apple casserole vegan chocolate pumpkin french toast
apple casserole vegan chocolate french toast
apple casserole vegan french toast
apple casserole french toast
apple french toast
french toast
pancakes
cherry pancakes
cherry gluten free pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta rum raisin pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta rum raisin buttermilk pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta rum raisin buttermilk poppy seed pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta rum raisin buttermilk pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta rum raisin pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon ricotta pancakes
cherry gluten free lemon pancakes
cherry gluten free pancakes
cherry pancakes
pancakes
omelette
bacon omelette
bacon watercress omelette
bacon watercress arugula omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata kale feta omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata kale feta flat parsley omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata kale feta flat parsley grape tomato omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata kale feta flat parsley omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata kale feta omelette
bacon watercress arugula frittata omelette
bacon watercress arugula omelette
bacon watercress omelette
bacon omelette
omelette
open beating your eating disorder:
  a cognitive-behavioural self-help guide for adult sufferers
to page xi

  a smashed weetabix
  and teaspoon of zero percent yogurt
  slimes over
  under cling film
  in the fridge

  *aw yu ad yer breakfast?*
  bio bifidus regularis spores
  erupt into ecosystems of their own

twelve oranges elbow each other
  in a scab-red bowl on the sill
reflect miniature sun-specks
as if they have eyes;
as if they're laughing

  a red-billed chough chortles
  from a bay leaf laurel
  the cirrus sky coughs
  holiday-postcard blue

no green woodpecker
has broadcasted itself
yet

  its irritating meditative *tap tap tap*…
lavender is rampant; bees romp

*fires in the luberon*

the bbc announces
*have killed off ninety-eight percent of the area’s wildlife*
*repopulation could take four to five years*

my ankles are rotund
fingers fat, ringless:

  my amber, enamel and onyx too snug
eyelids hooded, hot pink

  i google symptoms of
  heart failure
  kidney failure
  liver disease

then how many calories
per slice of brown bread
there are women in the story of a support group
they meet beneath lancet windows
unbiased white walls
dome ceilings
the flush of antiseptic light
silver belly of a tern as it passes
water in a jug on a table in the corner
marinating disks of lemon

their age gaps are generous
generations
they look nothing and everything alike
at the extremes of their bodies

they talk and talk
it smarts
drag veins
ghosts trolling beds
pasts niggling
phobias manifesting physically
germs, food, slitting, drugs, obsessive compulsion
entirely different but easily understood

and one woman
older
behind bifocals
hair feathered
gnatcatcher-grey
talks of time
the terror of it
eaten alive
if only she had more time

the room in its semicircle
sits up
a ruler-straight row
the youngest faces rose-redden
knowing this is what they have
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>annex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>linden</td>
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</tbody>
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fancy

*after mary rufle*

1

*wha wud juya fancy?*

me mum asks

i dont kno

earbudz in

starfished

ont grass

mi brain an mi belly

colludin
this is a fear one can have while lying
in a hammock on a beautiful day

tu t left
o t too blu pool
giddy begoniaz
daisies bask
titillated wrenz

    i watch
chevron an polka dot
swimsuited tinkerz

    runnin abou
ive no feelin
ov hungry
or full
jus concave or bloutud
seizmic gurglez
colon in conversation
only knowin ive gorra eat
wen i slow
to a stop
like a car wantin petrol

*spagetti armz an legz*
mi ballet teachuh
wud say

*shi can sleep on a washin line
thissun
an eats owt!*
i read
bodybuilduh
meal prep
— so! much! protein!
an restront menuz online

imagine maself there

wot wud i av?
this except tha an tha except this
salad insted o friez
hold t camembert
no feta or brie
dressin ont side
a waitresses nightmare
prolly thinkin
shurrrp!
i tell er itz intestinal issues
wich it iz
annall

bu at
ninety poundz
dissectin rocket
from bibb lettiss leavez
im pullin wool
oer nobodyz eyez
king west

rock pigeon  rock pigeon  rock pigeon  rock pigeon  american redstart
rock pigeon  jay

rock pigeon  rock pigeon  rock pigeon  rock pigeon  rock pigeon  rock pigeon
crow  field sparrow  field sparrow  starling  starling  starling  starling

house sparrow  house sparrow  house sparrow  house sparrow  crow
house sparrow  house sparrow  house sparrow

cardinal  peregrine falcon  chimney swift  crow  crow  crow  crow  crow

common nighthawk  passenger pigeon  northern flicker  king rail
american redstart  hooded warbler  yellow rail  red knot
swallow  swallow  swallow  swallow  swallow  swallow  swallow
swallow  swallow  swallow  swallow

chimney swift  chimney swift  crow
chimney swift  chimney swift
healthy

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    #foodp
underweight

#yum
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#yum #healthy
#yum #healthy #eatclean
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overweight

#fitfood #madewithlove #eat
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#fitfood #madewithlove #eat
obese

#pigout #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake
#pigout #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook
  #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook
  #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook #fattofit
  #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook #fattofit
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  #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook #fattofit
  #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook #fattofit
  #sweettooth #foodcoma #cake #cook #fattofit #workout
extremely obese
grenoside
grenoside

i

grenoside recluse
foun dead
at iz muther an dad’z
up stephen lane

detached treacle-black brick
clematis climbin
potted pansiez
bruise-yellow an mauve

int back bedroom
newspapers piled
curtainz shut clam-snuff
andsewn sanderson cotton

out back, greno wood
bluebell droves ringin
bullfinches, chiffchaffs
an redstarts in hysterics

fourth oldest
second youngest
o five brutherz
ed seen george,

a joiner,
month before.
a king’z own yorkshire
light infantry lad

not a knob o coal
int fire
innards maggoted
by pancreatic cancer

31
life an soul
e waz, our david
sat up to t table wi little unz
russets stewin ont

stove fo t crumble,
lemon curd an custard
tarts already in.
e ripped paper off

fag packets,
drew horsez trumpin
for our girlz an
firemen in gold button

uniformz fo t ladz
laughin, allus laughin
lot ov em.
e want same aftuh

bergen-belsen
emptyin those ovenz
o teeth, e said,
elbow-knuckles

sticks o bone
sheffield fellas first lot in,
social workerz smackin
ont front door

wi rosez round.
e went dead quiet
like e were allus there
like e nevuh come back
auntie frances
allus walked
between er mum’z
st. mark’s

an ourz
past poppiez
clotted int sage green grass
upt ginnel

in a mustard balaclava
bout three or four wooly ats
wi pom-pomz
an az many coats

button-holes pullin
roastin red like
a maris piper
whatever t weather

afraid o catchin cold
wantin marmalade
butties mekin
first o six sisterz

all but one spinsterz
from fellaz who wound up
downt trenches
an never med it back
headz were rollin down snig hill

it waz tha noisy
sirenz like a pack o dogz howlin
bombz thumpin
an mi mum’z best china

tinklin like st. mark’s bellz
int cabinet, an t house—
sandstone one it waz,
only one ont road wi a telephone,

mind you— shook an shook.
better make fo t anderson,
sez our margi, but
no mustached maniac,

sez our iris,
is disruptin my sleep
an shi dropped a stitch
on er knittin,

chucked hole lot int fire—
dusky rose mohair, it waz—
an stomped upstairz,
an mi dad, e sez

if one girl’z stoppin we all are
so we gorrin bed, lot ov uz,
bombs shootin like stars
lightin up room as if it waz mornin,

an me dad, e sez,
that un, e sez,
that un’z int back gardin,
there’l be a crater in me rosebushes

an me greenhouse glass
all about grass.
burrit warrin greno wood,
trees lollin like fistfuls o

giant weedz torn up,
out housez flat az card,
an headz were rollin
down snig hill
freddie

she wunt talk abou it
cept tu say freddie'z acciden
mi mum holdin im, newborn,
at top ot stone steps—

righ steep unz, they wa—
ot house on main street.
only boy, wha uz five sisterz.
she ad beddin an towelz annall

in er armz, burrit wa too much tu carry
an e came down wi t lot ov it,
on iz ead. int ospital fuh munths
we weren’t allowed tu visit, mind,

in case we hurt im, i spose,
evuh so pale, she sed e waz,
thin like a titchy bird
but when e wa better e came home

an that warrit. e waz allus a bit slow,
yunnow, but no one sed owt about it—
they dint diagnoze this or that
thing then like they do now—

until e got called up at eighteen
gorriz paperz int post
an me dad, e sez to me mum,
don’t worry he’ll not go, he’ll nevuh pass t medical,

they’ll find summat’s up wi im
burr e did. they sent im.
monte cassino’s where e’z burrid.
i’ve a picture ov it. all thoze white

white crossuz wi here liez so an so,
uther folks sunz an bruthuz,
on a grassy hill, red carnashunz laid about an
behind, mountainz, massive, an a superb sky
that un

along main street from st. mark's
past t post office to t
new house bein built
a cat trots
in socks an boots
two o six sisterz
one pair o trouserz between lot ov em
they draw strawz for an share
  navy linen
  sailor-like buttunz stitched
  across t belly
sheila
  t littley
haz em on wi a cap-sleeve cardi tucked in
  joan
two years abuv
in an accordion a-line skirt an a wing-collar blouze
it's well before t war
touse iz a sandstone husk
  though int gardin there’z already a botanical rumpus
  fuchsias pirouet on their stemz
  yellow-fringed pansiez
  foxgluvz openin their mauve pocketz to bee
from t fron bedroom winduh
two workmen
  good unz
  local ladz
  w snap boxez an
  wednesday-blue striped mugz o tea
dangle their legz over t ledge
which one d you fancy?
george raizez iz hand like a visor an
  pointz
  that un o er yonder
joan
pin

i remembuh er wen i sew
rare nowadaze
grea timez summat
auntie april may or june
na wudda known

yolk-yella crack o dawn
sun applaudin on t winduz

gorra be natrul ligh wen yer stitchin

nun o this lamp bizness

i pictuh william morris cottun
on er dolly
strawberry thief:
thrushes stealin fruit from t gardin
flutuh sleevez
indigo pipin
er singuh
spinnin round an round

royal doulton an denby dry on a tea towel by t sink
pantry floor freshly donkey-stoned
net curtaiz jostle an t tom cat mews at iz bowl fo bacun rindz

poppin pinz in er gob
one guz dahn
feelz like nowt ah first burrat suppertime
it zigzags like pinkin shearz through er innudz
mikado on t gramophone
folks singin along
this, oh, this,

oh, this,
this is what i'll never, never do!
dentist

snowin like clappersz, it waz,
mornin they med dentist free ont nhs.
bitter cold, frost like them spirographs
scribbled ont winduz.

cudnt feel mi finguhz!
que snaked all abou t village,
tunz o folks, yu cudnt count em,
old unz an little unsz annall,
brown an yella teeth, lot ov em,
nevuh ad em seen to.
i’d ad no trainin, mind,
showed up at sign-in office in me

bottle green uniform— it waz evuh
so itchy— an rag-curled airdo;
seems a nice girl, fella sed,
she’ll mek a decent dentl nurse,

so in i went an all wi did wa tek em out,
evry tooth, black, they wa, mostly,
“total removl,” they called it,
dint much matter state ov em:

wi did me mum’z an they wa
perfect pearl-white, beauties—
i lined em up ont tray afta like a necklace,
not a nic o decay— burrit wa fastest way,

yu see. wi ad to get thru em all
an she fancied dentures
so tha waz tha. i quit, tho,
once i found t dentist— luvly

bloke, e waz— afta hourz int
chair with iz tongue hangin out,
wee on iz trouzerz an all ovuh t floor,
laffin gas goin great gunz.
castle donington

stationed at castle donington
prizoner ov war camp
it werent alf mucky,
imagine one bath fuh seventeen uts,

ladz an ladiez sharin,
i’d be out me bunk by five
to ave a wash,
and there waz this one german pilot

we ad locked up,
right luvly lookin, e waz,
slick side-parted air,
sea-blue eyez an

teeth like a string o pearlz—
an i’d bin a dental nurse, member,
i knew good teeth—
who i tret a bit different,

yunnaw, an extra sliver o toast
or snuck im a fag.
e talked abou where e wa from,
int mountainz wi woodz tha thick

wi coniferz they looked like
black velvet from far off—
e ad superb english—
an when t war wa finished

an we packed up—
dunno wha they use it fo now,
concerts annall or summat—
e wrote a lettuh askin

me to marry im,
but me mum ripped it
into ribbons an chucked it int fire
like our iris’s mohair knittin
blackpool

blackpool becuz that's where yer went
seaside oneymoonz
all t rage post-war
they tek a bus tu t beach
    a baby blue ardshell case
    in each of iz handz
    arms locked like spring scalez
coast-essential emblemz:
    spiral soft serve in lattice conez
even though it's autumn
        remember
            remember the fifth ov november
brave girlz in skirted swimsuits
    picnic-ingham
    lilac ruffled-white
    crab-red thighz chappin pink
        — e wearz iz jim-jams under iz suit
nes

punch an judy row unduh a striped tent
boats wag their masts int harbour
homez stacked paperback-skinny ont cliff
    alf-moon bay windowz
    front doorz wi bronze knokerz
newzprint round cod an chips
    see-through wi batter-fat
they win tranklements in arcades
luminations
    ferris wheel
    ridge ov a rollercoaster
        like buntin but beaded
    bulbs blinkin
a chap ont pier takes their pictuh
    each smilin ont slats
sellz it to em forra few pence
    its right anglez roll up int
drawer beside er easychair
precious az a four-leaf clover
    i press it betweent pages ov a book's
        earliest chapterz
**cottage**

ey they marry quick
to earmark auntie mary’z empty cottage
    before squatterz settle in feral packs
    get comfy
curl round an round
she buyz a navy
    pencil-slim suit she’ll wear again
    practicality
bridezmaid dressuz she sewz erself
    hyacinth-blue
cap sleevez
    boat necks
    bodicez wi finicky
    parallel pintucks
cotton rationed
    *lucky they’re svelte*
the cottage ont common
set back in an inlet off high street
its post office
    green grocer
        butcher who savez er t nicest cutz ov
            liver
            rump
tongue
a cobbled yard
    outbuildingz knitted wi ivy
garnet-jewelled holly
    candy floss hydrangeaz
fo t bantams to run around
    poppy
    petal
penny who natterz tut sweet shop unduh er arm
    peck peck peckin at a silver-foiled chocolate penny
    hence er name
the stritch-stratchin ov mice
e ousts extended familiez from t ceilin
    bushells ov nests in its slopin slapdash roof
borrowz from t library a book on wirin
    duz it imself entirely
    exactly
    its intricate nettin behind replastered
    washed-white wallz
best job man fromt city haz evuh inspected
    buyz er an electric iron
right az it’s resold
workshop

iz workshop behind t dog an gun
through t privet-edged ginnel
a quintet o collared dovez fuss int eaves
their featherz puffed up
    woolly
    purplish sky-white an tabby-grey
e stoops
    tank-chested
whittles a baton ov oak
    *nice bit o wood that*
into a chair leg
    shapely
three precise ribz an a bulb at bottom
pets its slick finish
blowz dust all abou
    its snow settlin
carryin on
    e trimz four more
fastens em to a seat e ornaments wi a
circle ont back
brass buttonin t cushion wi iz
brawny
    intuitive handz
rabbit

gorra dead rabbit az payment for replacin t drawer-knob ov a sideboard

careful tu mek it luk like wunz e hewed

  a decade back

  sunken middle like a daizy

  groovez flowerin out to t edgez

e bringz body ome flopped over iz forearm

kitten-whiskered

  like a foxfur slung o er t shoulder ov a lady

  its snarl bared forevuh

inkwell irises fandangle t lawn

she skinz it

  snaps its ribcage open

  a boned-trove

  unbeatin heart like an opal

smacks blood on er apron

slicez

peelz

mashez mechanically

divviez an dishez everythin up

putz bowlz between sheffield-made stainless steel cutlery

starez into t rotund carcass

  cubed beside carrot-disks

  steam corkscrewin

imaginez easter bunniez clottin int fieldz

  their sniff-sniffin noses

  anemone-pink

or peepin behind eggz

  sand-yellow an tropic-aquamarine

  on cardz int chemist

  an sobz
a stroke

aftuh a stroke
  the peony ov a tumour
  lattices tendrilz across t ceilin ov iz skull
  petalz unwrap
  brain peach-pink
added complication ov parkinson’s
  unbalanced as if eel-toein a tightrope
    think ov im
      up there, she sez
      in iz flat-cap
      stick an tweed!
e’ll nevuh not shake
  tea sloshin t sidez ov iz sheffield wednesday striped mug
broadchin surgery
  e iz tickled that e’ll ave to be sat up
    an everlastin concave in t back ov iz ead
    like a spoonful scooped from melon flesh
e’ll no longer turn right so
she wallpaperz t sideboard wi city maps for
  routes so they can pivot left
iz tongue limps
  language-less
  taste budz shrivel to pocks
it shan’t come back
  specialists say
but she knocks iz bloomin socks off
  wi a vindaloo in front ot telly
    cumin, cayenne, coriander, shoutin
wha the bloody ell dya call this!
am i eighty?

iz it me birthday;
am i eighty?
for yearz wen told
summat special’z on today

we move iz party
to accommodate my recital
come unto him
at dore an totley united reformed church
only our jessica can sing e sed
to me gran
hummin as she feather-dusted
ung beddin on t line

week before
on t phone to me mum
er ead tilted
receiver between er shoulder an er ear
she counts on er fingerz

our lizzie an our charlie an our emily an our billy
you an your luce an your jess

i’ll make madeleines
lemon curd tartz
butterfly bunz
an you gerra caterpillar cake
from marks & sparks

on t day
sky oat-white
orse chestnuts look crayoned-on
leavez shined by a shower
conkerz amassin like marblez

e’z enjoozin iz sen
opens cardz
scoffs choccies
unwraps a green-marl merino wool cardi
turnz to me
sez stick telly on
wednesday’z playin
an it’s time these buggerz were gerrin off ome
lived int same house since we waz marrid—
bonfire nigh, that waz— wunce we got
shuvvd out ot main street cottage cuz me
auntie mary sold it from under uz,

tho george wired it out, lot ov it, imself,
frum a book e gorrout ot library
council owned two-up two-down at top
ot ginnel, built just after t war, before

ecclesfield waz part ov sheffield:
townies, city lot, we called em. had to
get rid ot bantams— no room fuh
penny, poppet, buttercup, or other unz

without yard round back— an it want
same afta: orrible shame, no more eggz
laid int shrubs or kitchin cupboardz
beside ovaltine an tetley, or sat watchin

doctor who ov a saturday night, a brown
brick semi— yu cud hear next door’z edgar
yawnin int afternoon as if e warrin
yrown front room! wi kept it nice

mind you— hangin baskets wi fuschias,
velvet-lookin pansiez, an cherry tomatoez
int gardin; an outbuildin for iz woodwork.
it warront glorious twelfth, 1989

e applied fo t central heatin installation—
wi know tha cuz itz when t littley waz born.
gave t fella at british gas
jessica forra password cuz e

wunt forget it. weren’t til er
twenty-sixth birthday we got tut top
ot list: i waz turned eighty-eight—
two fat ladiez— an e oer a decade gone

by then; twenty-six yearz ov seein
yer breath int loo, socks smokin ont
radiator like whitby kipperz
strung up, an space heaterz all about
rhubarb triangle

between t acute anglez ov
wakefield, morley, an rothwell
rhubarb triangle
one-undred-an-fifty yearz
ov early arvest
along t penninez’ spine
compound ov eavy clay topsoil
enriched wi t wool industry’z ashez
manure an shoddy
area given protected designation ov origin status
like champagne, an melton mowbray pork piez
only this iz yorkshire forced rhubarb
seesawed from wet-warmth to intense cold
it’z t sweetest, softest, pinkest crop
pitchforked into dark, squattin shedz
once eated wi coal—
this is wha waz minin cuntree—
now gas
coddlin meks it behave like it’z spring
coral clumps shovin out shoots like antennaz
eyez ont endz
in search o sun
andpicked by candlelight
stewed, baked, brewed into
jamz, piez, beer
for february’z festival
crematorium

ov course it’s spittin
    a non-stop milk-churnin mist
    t sort tha soaks yu while
    yu wunder whether
    it’s wet enuf to bring a brolly
most do
they clump in dowdy prints
    around t porch
mournerz arrivin in their
    navy
    smog-grey
    an black
delphiniumz curtsey ont hud ov t hearse
it jus so appens tha the crematorium iz where
    they courted
    was farmland this
horse-populated
ungroomed ryegrass
    we packed picnics
    scotch egg
    am sarnies
    i wore skirts i’d sewn mi sen
    tha sanderson’z
    int back bedroom airin cupboard
    it’ll fi yu
    i wa tha slim
greenz an beeverz covey from all abou
ecclesfield
grenoside
barnsley
    old codgers
    dodderin in
at end ot servis
    the hovis theme: dvorak’s new world symphony largo
az curtainz close around iz coffin
    she leanz in
    sniffle-snifflin
    a hanky at er pinking-nose
    yer daft yu lat
    ed ave sed
    burnin it
    nice bit o wud that
ecclesfield

polyanthurz, these, beautiez, or posiez
they call em, white unz annall, an t
rosemary’z rampant; howz it go?
parsley sage rosemary an thyme

   in er kitchen i am
door handle high
maris piperz bob
sliced to soldierz
corkscrewin steam
on t hob

   a spinach corsage
smashed garlic
thyme starz
tomatoez cardinal-red
a wrung lemon
a white vinegar wince

remembuh mi tu won boo
livz there, shi wunce wasz
a tru luv ov mine
that’s it int it?

   in her marl grey
merino wool cardi
she peelz
the tomcat carriesz
a mouthful ov mouse
a blue tit titivates

   in holly beyond the sill
felt pansiez
tulips exclaim
yellow! orange! cream!
restarts contentious
in their sloping vs

ob if i cud fly
muscle tension dysphonia
false cords

poco fa
heidenröslein
come unto him in the country
gekommen bright is the ring of words mädchen

fern hill mon cœur
s'ouvre à ta voix oft denk’
ich, sie sind nur alone, and yet alive
aus ausgegangen ave maria there is
der welt abhanden beauty in the bellow
voi, che sapete blast una voce
una donna a quindici anni
i have dreamed chacun a son goût
l’eau when i am laid in earth
das senza euridice les chemins de
may abide the day that labour love
his coming ständchen wind blows once
all ye you lose your heart babbino caro
d’amore fairest isle a weekend o mio

l’amour but who a green cornfield en sourdine blows as
che faro mondnacht au bord de
o bei nidi der tot und
die nacht
true cords

balloon kreeee
in-switch-out-in-switch-out breathing low
alternate nostril breathing tutu high palate buzz
low larynx inhalations: yawn surprise ah pot oh snort

long toes laryngeal massage front of hill krrrrrr
breathe and go cathedral inhalation phonation

spinning air vvvvvvvvvv ground your feet
krrray (kissy lips) no no no no noooooo

1-3-5-1 kroh (alveolar ridge) tongue anchor brrr ooh

deadface 1-3-5-8-5-3-1 stanza-by-stanza teeth last resort
(don’t smile) molars sleep sleep sleep tip over

ee-ay-oh-oooh elevator shaft air
pelvic floor down accelerate

on ah

octave jump

ee/ah/ooh/oooh coloratura
ich bin der welt push-pull no ee focus ah oh
(impossible to squeeze)

target resonance and go
vowel balancing big space
tennis ball core engagement
dial between nose and throat
reenergize pyramid 3 beats
slide down inhale oh sing oh
cricothyroid release belly out
buoyant & springy & sparkly

ding! ding! ding! storytelling
4 phrase chunks polish rep
tall ah high jet pack
pashmina la la ya ya nga nga
fingers on chin jammed jaw
5-3-1 ee-ay ee-ay ee-ay

yay yay yay yaaaaaaaay snore
make it beautiful ko ko ko
kay kay kay kay scrape
eighth-note repeated pulse
my oh my oh my key-ay
mah-ee-oh mon coeur
nyay-ay-ay-nyay-ay-ay slinky
(little by little) nyah nyah nyay
my oh my

ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma

ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma

ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma

ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma ee oh
ma ee oh ma

my oh
my oh
my oh
my oh

54
nyay
kay

kay kay kay
kay kay kay kay kay kay kay
kay kay kay kay kay kay kay
kay kay kay kay kay kay kay
kay kay kay kay kay kay kay
toronto and winnipeg
Tuesday

Pigeons upholster a wire. The sky diffuses, apricot to
coffee-ground black. I pick off my nail polish like it's
my job, don’t— quietly— don’t, don’t eat exactly sixteen
grapes (every night.) Amalgamate skittering thoughts;
midges in a net. Me step-grandad sold cigarettes from
a dispenser on t kitchen wall, smoked most ov em

iz sen, lungs congested wi cancer, treacle-like tar.
I backspace a comma, consider a semicolon. Below,
a streetcar bells. Its Tristan chord stacks an augmented
fourth, sixth, and ninth above the bass, elicits a wince,
like chewing lime when expecting tangerine, segments
riddled with pips, maggrot-white. My main coon,

spine turned, rearranges his coat on the arm of the settee.
Cats don’t worry about being seen as antisocial, walk
away when they’ve had enough human, will stalk a wiggle
of string, suspend disbelief, imagine a vole. My shoulders
are up to my earlobes, the stiffness of over-pumped tyers.
You visit, undisclosed. There’s a better way to cook.

You are glassy. You are lavender in my pillowcase. Later,
water stutters, kneads me. My voice will never be more
radiant than in the bathroom with the shower on full.
Last Child in the Woods

*after Richard Louv*

i

Rain-bashed yard,
yarrow skirts fraying.

Branch fingers scissor
cardinal-yellow light.

Cicadas brawl.
Magpie, warbler, thrush.

Tiptoed, hands starfished,
breath fogging

French windows.
A pair of plum-red

smacked bottoms for
grubbing the glass.
Mother-in-Law’s Tongue
on the counter, reeking

Lysol. Yellow-green
rug moss between toes.

Wall, cerulean sky.
Cosmos confined to a

computer screen square.
Blue-headed vireos

belong in books, and
ruby-crowned kinglets,

white-breasted nuthatches.
Aurora Borealis clotting

over prairie suburb sprawl
will be watched on television.
A tomcat carries
mouthfuls of mouse
across the lawn.

Her room is glitter.
Sparkle shards
snowflaked to the carpet.

On each foot a different
shoe, one that shotguns stars
when she stomps.

Plastic constellations.
She practices port de bras,
jeté, arabesque.

Doorknob reimagined
as a barre.
A tutu cinches her
grapefruit belly.
The bulb button where
mommy says the
midwife didn’t finish
her off right. Through the
window, soil gunges

in flower beds.
Peonies drool
remnants of rain.

There are mud pies
to be made, elbows and
knees to be muckied.

Little girls belong inside.
Skull stuffed
with such feathers.
Raspberries in Yiddish

A restaurant, emptying. Coffee sickle moons stain the tablecloth. Zadie at the head. His hands flop one atop the other, like limp rhubarb leaves. His hair, once shoe-polish shiny, now cowlicked like a kid’s, his smile, permanent as if painted. The calm you see on matryoshka doll mouths. The waitress’ uniform, embroidered cheesecloth blouse, reminds him of the old country, girls’ rumps on bicycle seats, dust mushroom-clouding as they ride dirt roads. He churns the question, What’s the word for raspberries in Yiddish? laboriously like butter, answers long after the conversation changes course, as if the congregation had sat in silence, waiting, his hearing now that of a white cat. He stands, spine the curl of a coat hanger, shuffles on slippered feet: bunions make lace-ups unbearable. He is steered at the elbow by his son, my uncle. The night sags like an aran wool jumper on a line. Rain clouds ruche, so close you could, on tiptoe, touch them. He slips like a soap-bar towards a forgotten bottle, red wine bordering black in its belly. Bottoming the lot, he turns to me, aged nine, bangs obscuring my eyes, says, Never leave alcohol unattended on a table.
April. Visit your GP because you can’t shake this blue. It’s darkening. Navy nightshade. Squid ink indigo, borderline black. You can’t scrub your skin with nailbrush bristles because it burrowed, like a tick. Injected its innards. Made your blood run blue. He asks you if you’re sleeping, eating. No. He seems afraid of you. Of your blueness and your womanness combined. He prescribes you trazodone, for sleep. Refers you to Mount Sinai’s psychiatric ward (the same hospital that will remove your colon, the following March). Await your appointment. Ring your mother. How her voice tethers when you spiral, like a helium balloon released by a fist. May. Revisit GP. Still not sleeping, eating. Coal coloured clouds grow hands. Wring your neck like a beer-wet bar rag, you say. *Are you a threat to yourself or others?* By now, the blue has taken root. The blue of lips surrounding chattering teeth. The blue of rot. A decomposing blue.
I reach across the
table to where you are
not, find only a chalk
moon, waning,

your mug, coffee
cooling, and
drink heartily.
Sun slips through
the blinds like balm.
I shake the snowy
silence that settled
on your rooftop
in Winnipeg,

air your dust-frosted
rooms. In Gimli,
I run with you,
barefoot until fall.
North wind knifes us
at Portage and Main,
cossacks and pogroms
reimagined between
silver birches,
cobwebbed in hoarfrost,
aurora borealis blinking green.

Your lieder leave my
throat: Schubert,
Strauss, Columbia
Recordings on
repeat.
Hospital is Home

On the fourteenth floor, you know you’re in for the duration. Not

the rapid fire turnover of the twelfth, booting patients on their third day,

ready or not, budget ballooning (like your bowel) to bursting.

There’s a community, congregating on couches, here

beside the vending machine bloated with treats we cannot eat,

IV pumps whining in discord to be plugged in. We barter,

like farmer’s market goers in Saturday morning sun, for sugar sachets

on meal trays of prune juice and broth, swap Snack Pack jellies for applesauce,

whatever the machinery of our middles can mince. And I’m ashamed

of my anxiety— nearing four weeks post-op, yo-yoing between hospital and home—

when I’m told this is my month three, or five or eight. Hospital is home,

surgery pending, limbs pencil skinny, belly shutting up shop.
Now, Sisters

If all I learned to be is small,
shrink stringbean slim,
to eat the least, to eat last,
once everyone is sleeping,
seismic wave snoring,
perched stork-like
in the fridge’s celestial glow;

if I inherited this hymn
from my grandmother,
and her grandmother,
to use my littlest voice,
the shrapnel of it,
meant for inside only,
among quilted cushions

despite my studying,
slowly, to fatten, to take
up room, inching in,
elbows at severe angles;
I will ask my sisters,
 once brothers, now sisters,
more woman than I will ever be—

stiletto-stilted, silver shadow
 to their eyebrows, wigged
and gorgeous, glittering
and light— to bring the size,
they say, their forefathers
lent them, to ask loud
questions on behalf of us all.
university health network

naproxen psyllium
husks acetaminophen
trazodone quetiapine
align pantoprazole
zofran docusate
sodium polyethylene
glycol 3350 cipralex
gravol imigran
morphine golytely
dilaudid paracetamol

naproxen psyllium
husks acetaminophen
trazodone quetiapine
align pantoprazole
zofran docusate
sodium polyethylene
glycol 3350 cipralex
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trazodone quetiapine
align pantoprazole
zofran docusate
sodium polyethylene
glycol 3350 cipralex
gravol imigran
morphine golytely
dilaudid paracetamol
Two Piece

Shocked of summer in May,
everyone’s outside. Rompers,
shades, saucer wide, double
denim, Bellwoods Brewery

IPAs in bicycle baskets.
Vintage at College and
Ossington, dresses dangle
from rails; rayon, viscose,
crepe, short shorts in discount
bins; aqua stripes, mauve tulips.
What’s inside is too much,
thrifted by pickers, retro sequined
to catwalk pomp and prices.
Curbside baskets call bargain!
Bikinis, migraine onset
fluorescent, decadent floral,
raring for Cherry Beach in
August, until I remember the
hot pink flesh zipper on my belly,
how it ruches and pleats the skin

that surrounds it, how,
like a clone, they took my belly
button with my colon,
how I’ll never be able to cover it again.
activities that distract me from my anxiety

studying the menus of restaurants i'll never eat at in cities i'll never visit
riding through my favourite neighbourhood to bike through
    the lower atrium of the annex just below bloor
mining for canlit in bmv
gregorian chant
buying long-necked oversized squash at the maynooth farmer's
    market and surrounding roadside produce stands
mahler
hydromorphone and imovane
together
bbc radio four's drama of the week
flora the dachshund a coworker sometimes brings to the office
scarfing a cantaloupe-plump orange
    squeezing a minimum of twelve before picking one
moscato
thrifting
searching for discounted return flights from toronto to manchester
watching figure skating
taking google street view strolls around neighbourhoods where i used to live
sudoku
eating with the multi-ribbed dessert fork i accidentally thieved from a wedding
    reception in haliburton ontario
visualizing myself at an event held by the manitoba ferret association
    ferrets in top hats and headband bows
    on santa's lap
    ransacking bowls of packing peanuts
goderich

1

beyond the pine-dark room
a bird's recitative
  five or six belts
  and a belly laugh

another's flutter-tongued
  hemidemisemiquavers

  somewhere

a strained
snap snap snap
how the living room
furniture
is not organized
   around
   a television

a corduroy settee
   a la-z-boy set to
recline

   on the kitchen table
fruit flies sozzled
in a coffee cup
beach towels over chair backs
   bacon fat in a
      milk carton
   beside the sink
i slip the screen aside
  moths clatter
  their muslin wings
  against mesh
  dozy in the day

down
two steps
  moving around the cottage
past a cartoon owl
in a clot of ivy

green wets my socks
a robin surges
for the ripe green
safety of undergrowth
  clips
  a sheet
  on the line

the flat plain of her back
  her soft red stripe
sequin leaves shuffle
the frumpy skirt
of a baseball glove
    a branch
    for a bat

    on the picnic bench
a blue-headed
black-bodied insect
ever-pulsating
    a gossip of carnations

i climb the porch
a school of gulls silver
    over the
sea-long lake

i fold forward
touch
my toes
double highfive the deck
decide
i'll wear a dress today
The Kitchen

The kitchen has a double-doored fridge. It beeps if left open for more than twelve seconds, or so. Alarmism over the quickness of decay. A line of splat-splats on hardwood that get fatter and further apart approaching the sink; liquid globbed over the lip of its container, haphazardly cleaned, residual stickiness amassing circles of dust. I stand stork-like, one leg a load-bearing beam, Limon and Graham techniques leftover from my teens, quintessential contractions: the scooped belly, the c-curved spine. Compost. Heaped books. A drained glass. Worry—about what?—ruches my organs in ribbons. The coffee-maker slurs. Air conditioning clucks on. The dishwasher bucks before a pause. Tea towels. Braeburns. Ciabatta crumbs. Butternut squash shells on the cutting board. Sun slants in staves through the blinds onto the browning bromeliad. I sling milk from the jug into a bowl of All-Bran, throw it immediately in the bin.
Killaloe

In a burrow of books, blankets, and coffee cups on the dock, we coo, cat-like, touch our toes. Stop-sign red mosquito bites itch our ankles and wrists. The slap of water against the boat. A hawk loop-the-loops like a stringless kite. An oriole’s soliloquy; cicadas in their sole-noted, cyclical, crescendoing leitmotif: the brush’s symphonic chiascuro from focoso to flautando. We flesh out gender tropes: girls in our feline stretching, pluck raspberries like bells from bushes. Boys execute inaccurate somersaults: a starfish, arrow-dive (fingertips to toes), cannonball’s timpani-triumphant splash, resurfacing with sequins on their shoulders. Resplendent blues of the wrap-around sky and lake, underbellies of lazing cloud.
Bankrupt

A guided tour of the house:
his teddies and trucks an
exhibition curated on window sills,
pillows, chests of drawers.
Hand puppet bats, a battery
powered pony that neighs and
trots, a mallard that quacks
if you squeeze its middle.
His cardinal-patterned bedspread.

Put the seat down or the cat
will drink from the bowl. It's 20,
feels like 22, and radiant outside;
we watch from the window.
He knows the names of the
birds who frequent the garden:

hummingbird, woodpecker,
wren. Bunnies ate the tulip and
onion bulbs: at least they had

a snack. A red squirrel carries
a skull-sized walnut across the yard.
In the basement, boxes of
everything his mother has owned
since 1976. Sulking, unworn,
plastic-wrapped, at the back

of the closet, dangle dresses,
brilliant prints, all-night online
shopping bankrupting them.
get well soon

i open his envelope
below a honey locust’s leaves
  bough batons
up and down-beating
  antiphonal wrens
dad’s loop-the-loop lettering
i shiver at its scarcity
  spine hairs on end
  i slip my thumb under the gummy tab
unfold my stepsister’s triptych
  portioned with precision
unstuck stickers snowflake to cement
  yeah! super! #1!

the tacky relief of wax crayon
determined zigzags
  leaned into with welly
full-fisted vigour
you will get well soon

there are three figures
  the larch i recognize from the garden
    host to a wagon-red cardinal
  two girls
    in triangle-dresses
      plank-flat hairdos
  barbed-eyelashes
petunias helix at their feet
  in coral, pea-green, lavender
citrus-tart oranges and yellows
  glitter gunges the reverse
    her letter scribbled over a letter
repurposed packing slip
  tracking number and barcode
lines fat-thin-fat
an expedited parcel
  from shoes.com
Now We Are Twenty-Six

Our neighbours are tea drinkers. The kettle singing at seven-thirty is all we hear across the hall. I sleep one way, corpse-flat, left shoulder shoved under a mashed pillow, face tilted to blanks between the blinds. Re-reading, I find numbers penciled in books, calories counted.

In the shower, like Goldilocks, a stickler, the water a touch cold or hot, never just right. The salve of fresh sheets, makeup removed. Nails lacquered, accentuating the line of the moon, I am a girl who, for a ringing phone or a tall can cracked on a patio below, drops exactly nothing.
Grace

I visit my grandmother at the Grace hospital, in a quadrant of the city neither of us knows: Winnipeg bloating its tarmac-rash across blue grama grass. It's hot as a horsefly hive. I take two buses, change at Polo Park, regret wearing camel-suede booties: my heels hurt. I sit up front, close to the driver, so not to miss my stop. A child in a stroller eats a stack of salt crackers. Seven at once. A man knocks my sunglasses clean off my head. In the yellow-lit ward, marigold stems double over on a shelf, water curdling in their vase. Beside, the outskirts kink on my step-sister's glitter and wax crayon Get Well Soon.

She's been here so long, she says, that the building beyond the in-out drive was once a parking lot. Guffawing diggers and stop sign red cranes. There's a novel, a napkin, and a crumb-encircled, half-eaten cinnamon roll on her table. The television, on its bendable arm, addresses the wall. I ask her who's Genevieve? The lady she painted in green with hair scooped like a sundae into a bun on her head. Knife-slim nose, ferocious expression. She tells me her cousin is actually her brother: a secret tidied away between Poland and the prairies, pursing her mouth so her cheeks gather in pintucks. A bluebottle slams itself against the window.

An IV mews to be plugged in. She'll move into a condo on Wellington, overhanging the Assiniboine. Her PhD can wait. Her sister-in-law is singing with the San Francisco symphony. Doors at seven. Her sweetheart-neck, drop-waist dress will do. Press it, please. The social worker interrupts, reports that she's going into a home. Insufficient mobility. It takes two people to move you, he says. She looks at me. Into me. The coin of a cataract sparkles on her left eye. A lassoed, animal panic. Someone's been shot at Redwood and Main, her roommate's news story announces. Don't grow old, she says, it's graceless.
Every night I dream about my Dad’s children. Their shapes morph from kittens coiling their bodies around my ankles, to dolls, then babies. Not yet walking. Pudgy splats of children, lolling lumps of clay on the carpet. They wear plush, fuzzy jumpsuits. Brilliant colours. They make me love them. The kind of love I don’t know what to do with. The kind that’s so big I can’t hold it, like a bouquet of glittering, helium-filled balloons without ribbons to grip. I curl my arms wide like a globe around them; still, they flutter away, rainbow specks decorating sky. The kind that floods my body with its ocean. The kind that folds my heart up really small, into a tiny frightened square, then bursts it into flames or flowers. The kind that makes me want to scoop them, swing them, squeeze them, push my face into their pink cheeks.

The girl looks at me. Looks like me. The boy too. Swat their little hands in the air— pulsating blue, slowly, like water— thrust their arms up, their eyes like four stars, desperate to be picked up. I try. Desperate, too, to fill my lungs with that soft baby smell, soothe them in the hammock of my arms. But they’re too heavy. I heave and clamour, my face screaming scarlet, frustration bubbling in my chest.

And then I wake up.
flatline

for jessica(s)

i

when it rains it drizzles ceaselessly
so everything gets soaked

in my dreams I sleep
  until six

ribs are scaffolding
stretch skin like cellophane
over leftovers
grated inside out

by a gang
of moths
    their hooligan wings

she won’t make it through the night
sudafed-drunken
a purposeful od
on-call to hit
book flight
at the
    drop
    of a held hand

i text
    please keep me posted
    twelve times
    had a muffin for breakfast
    yeah right
auto-correct predicts words
that start with
ε will be cat
    a for anxiety

binge on radio
    shurrup brain
writing worries on vulnerable pink

wet nurse futility
    loss
remember her arm in pickle jar juice
up to her elbow
blue bottles belly-up
in the crimps of curtains

_kalinka moya_

everyone needs their peck of dirt
a biro explodes its black bowels
in my backpack
bloodies everything

i find a ttc token
and a ten pound note
in the breast pocket of my autumn coat
    i am not stung by a bee

her paintings populate my walls
i inherited her cat
    he throws himself at the window
    at bluetits barking
    in the nude arms of an ash

    the drill from condo construction
drones the unshakeable f of a
    flatline
our daddy iz a funny un
ez gorra face like a spanish oniun
a nose like a squashed tomahto
an legz like two props!
an the mummy duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
an the mummy duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
duz luv
i attempt from luv's sickness

to fly in vain
since i am myself my own fevuh
since i am myself my own fevuh
and pain:

no more now
no more now
fond heart
wi pride no more swell
thou canst noh raiz forsuz
thou canst noh raiz forsuz
enuf to rebel

for luv haz more power
an less mercy than fate
to make uz seek ruin
to make uz seek ruin
an luv thoze that hate

i attempt from luv's sickness

to fly in vain
since i am myself my own fevuh
since i am myself my own fevuh
and pain:
time tu go home
time tu go home
la la la la la la
la la la la
time tu go home
time tu go home
grannie iz wavin gudbye
gudbye gudbye
sheffield and moscow
The Wrong Place

A nearly full moon, 
chalk disk on black 
and lilac smudged 
sky; alone. Stars 
snuffed out in cloud

pockets. Wind elbows 
thorn-crowned 
thistles, skinny weeds 
romping. I watch 
from the window

a crank in the bowl 
of my belly, its fog 
carouselling. Sharper 
now, severing meat. 
A circular mammal

slinks to the pit 
of my shoulders, 
gorging bone 
branches. I wish 
I would die, I say.

let it be wings ladderling 
flesh into feathers 
to fly me. Cardinal 
riverbanks burst, 
cranberry clots on cotton,

reservoir of blood. 
 Everything silver, 
bleached clean. 
Little fiddlehead unfurling, 
you can’t grow there.
moscow

misha

ninaz rung
mishaz missin
they wa off up tu t dacha fo t weekend
an she waz waitin inna cafe wi anya
— anyaz eight by now, int she, yu wunt believe!—
euz it waz snowin like t clappuz
an e waz gerrin t car out ot garage
— they live in wun ov them stalin-era weddin cake bildingz
yulla seen em ont telly.
they wa waitin an waitin, nina an anya,
but no sign ov im
e nevuh came back
e’z bin bumped off, nina sez, she’z sure.
well e warran istry professor at moscow university, want e
before it all came a cropper wit coup
— staunch party membuh,
ard communist, yeah right! wat wi our little un cuddled on iz knee.
i’m sposed to av a lessun wi nina tommorrah
— studyin pushkin this week—
but yunnow uz
we’d’ve gone shoppin instead
I’mnippin ovuh now forra cuppa
bless er
yeah i’ll send yer luv

***

ninaz dead now
she died about nine yearz ago
she alwayz used to tell me
she tuk aftuh er parents
an wud die young
i told er not to be daft
burrit waz az if she wa doomed
so sad
dumbo

e bashed me up wit bristle-end
ov a broom ont bus
bananuz pinched from ma bag
freckled beige-brown
the stink ov em wat giveaway
me skinz aubergine-purple
where e punched me
coldz a tartness ive nevuh known
all t ladiez link arms ere
fur— noh knitted— ats an muff's
snowflakes fat az fists
at ome we’ve a cockroach nest int oven
i’m sick ov hearin em
tick tick tickin linoleum
therez talk ov a queue int market
to gerrin at 2 a.m. latest
cuz someonez sellin tomatuz
— ow long av we been without em?—
an t littley’ll scoff em ole
juice an seedz chappin er chin
if i ask er what’s father christmas fetchin you?
she’z sure e’z gunna bring a dumbo
az broad az that!
an she’z nevuh been to yorkshire
Turned Around Here

So much green you want to drink it, roll in it, tail wagging, drunk as a dog.

In the grey pond fish surface from the murky beneath. Their bull’s-eye ripples.

The slide, rollercoaster-wild, is no taller than you. The verge you log roll is grassy, aflame,

daffodil starry. You get so turned around here. Fold your feelings into frightened squares,

muddle them in the belly of a hat. Remove them, smooth

them, align them, one by one.
Cannon Hall Farm

*The Garden*

The house presides over its grounds
corkscrewing paths, yews, stone arches
from Cawthorne and Silkstone churches.

Laburnum drips gold onto the grass.
Workers’ cottages slouch around back,
crawling ivy, walls curved, beginning
to buckle. Wisteria climbs. Lilac, lemon
and rose rhododendrons. Around the pond:
stinging nettles, dandelion clocks, mallards
strutting, chests first. A little girl in a
gingham schooldress asks how long until
Christmas, log-rolls the lawn. Within the
walled gardens, forget-me-nots, fruit trees
and bushes: gooseberry, plum, cherry,
currant, hazelnut, nectarine, quince. Nearly
forty varieties of pear: Laxton’s Early
Market, Pitmaston Duchess, Conference.
The House

A manor from a Bronte saga. The sudden cool of inside, contrary order of dishes behind glass. A volunteer yawns from his post beside the Moorcroft pottery; Seraphim and Snowflake Moth. In the uppermost, easternmost corner, an Evelyn De Morgan. Pre-Raphaelite painter, her Boreas and Oreithyia of 1896. Greek god of the northwest wind carries the princess away, four sculpted reprises of Boreas around the frame: basso-relievo. So much movement: billows of cloth in countless figure eights, hooped against the barbed rock below. Chiaroscuro: folds and spirals shadowed, then immediately illuminated. Furious blue-blacks wash to peach and pearl on higher cloud. She is plump, pinkish, yellow hair waterfalling, modelled by De Morgan’s maid. Velveteen wings punctuate his ankles and shoulders. Fetishized, Grecian gold, his muscles are dark, hard, round, tender.
The Tea Room

Sun enough to sit on the patio. It’s muggy, the clouds close, a shower fermenting. Granna finger-wagged into a wheelchair.

No nonsense. Elated as she’s sped through aisles of fuchsias, petals split into skirts, nasturtiums with lilypad leaves, rhubarb taller than me. We shove two picnic tables together. She says she’ll are what everyonez avin: meat and tatey pie, puff pastry, jackets with beans, cheddar and chutney, prawns. Plumps for Whitby haddock and mushy peas; manages most of it. The weir crackles. Moorhens prune rogue feathers. Starlings flirt. My cousin’s Border Collie, Bel, begs, lays her head in alternate laps, coils into a circle in the slatted-shade. Remember our Rose. Dint growl. Dint bark at burglarz who broke in through t pantry an smashed me geraniums int sink. These dotted memories, her contrapuntal variations on a theme; no finale.
erase

so much for a red-hot breton summer
the sky brews black; the peril of rain
chickens cuckoo on the doorstep

hydrangeas— brittany’s national
flower— opulent in lavender
aquamarine, mother-die white-pearl

our neighbour pulls up to the curb
hunched, half-toothless holding
a bushel of broccoli like a bouquet

courgette like a police baton under
his armpit; potatoes bloodied in mud
grosse legume! i try j’adore legume, merci!

my tongue in stirrups thinks in
german not french; dankeschön familiar
a man with no fixed abode i jigsaw-puzzle

together slit another man’s throat in
vannes for urinating against the wall of a
church after dredging a barrel of wine

his own vin rouge marinates on the
table in a glass. j’ai soixante-quinze ans
j’ai vingt-sept i manage back: half his age

broaching trente. la vie est trop court
he adds; another lifetime worth of
work, i think, to erase myself in full
to york

every town has a station
tracks purl into the platform

unseen birds in polyphony
a wagtail's pizzicato

a thrush tolls in triplets
taken by the blue-winged magpie

forgetting he's a thief:
other species' eggs

milk bottle foil
anything that shines

a chap to my left
greets me mornin

walks with a stick
the curl of a mallard's neck

on board
the sorting out of tickets

day or open returns
to silkstone, denby dale, york

vowels
skipping-stone flat

rowan and poplar leaves
exhale fields

buttercups stutter
foxgloves bell

drystone comes a cropper
coil-legged sheep

and lambs
bathtubs full of fodder

washing out to dry
tractors rust red

delayed by brown cows
on the line

we slip in and out of tunnels
on the spindle of a viaduct

huff rollercoaster high
above houses

tomatoes sweat in greenhouses
early girl

cherry and brandywine
the pinstriped regimen of allotments
Rhubarb Triangle

Between the acute angles of Wakefield, Morley, and Rothwell, the Rhubarb Triangle. One hundred and fifty years of early harvest. Along the Pennines’ spine, the compound of heavy clay topsoil, enriched with the wool industry’s ashes, manure, and shoddy, awarded the area Protected Designation of Origin Status. Like Champagne, and Melton Mowbray pork pies, only this is Yorkshire Forced Rhubarb. Seesawed from wet-warmth to intense cold, it is the sweetest, softest, pinkest crop. Pitchforked into dark, squatting sheds, once heated with coal—this is, what was, mining country—now, gas. This coddling triggers spring-like behavior; each coral clump puts out antenna-esque shoots, eyes on their ends, growing rapidly in search of sun, handpicked by candlelight, stewed, baked, brewed into jam, pies, beer, applauded annually at a festival in February.
1

the andantino
spat spat spat spat spat
of footsteps
on the pier

*yer flat feet ab jus like yer dadz!*

2

*gerrarten ib!*
*i wah gunna purrit in mi sarnie tumorra*

bacon sandwich/butty/bloomer/bap

3

*mi gran sez*
*mi mum sez*
*mi dad sez*
*summat*

*i thought you were sisters?*

4

*gerra grip o yer knickers, girl!*

me mum allus sed
nevuh leave yer house
wi out an haypeny
in yer pocket an a
safety pin in case yer
knicker lastic snaps
A Couple

I meet a couple at an exhibition in Rochefort-en-Terre. His oil paintings stucco the walls. Frames mahogany, dusted gilt, carved, ornate. A couple, I predict, until he putters my daughter. He's in three-piece, fox orange-brown tweed; she is cuddled in a blanket poncho. Russian, I suppose, from his landscapes: Breton-like pastures, hay bale roulades, but telltale onion domes in the distance give it away. She reminds me of me: her bob, lofty cheekbones, severe fringe. Me, six years younger. Above the mantle, hemmed by still-lives—pumpkin, mirabelle plums, white-green grapes—is the portrait of a woman who could be my grandmother. Her calm, close to cross, expression. Fur muff. Wedding-cake office block beyond. Come to Moscow! Bring your books! I’ll translate your poems! A pull, always, to go back.
<table>
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<th>cannon hall farm</th>
<th>the house</th>
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<td>sudden coolness</td>
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<td>a volunteer</td>
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<td>yawns</td>
<td>moth</td>
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<td>contrary order of dishes</td>
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<td>moorcroft pottery</td>
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<td>evelyn de morgan</td>
<td>boreas and oreithia</td>
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<td>uppermost</td>
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<td>pre-raphaelite</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>north-west wind</td>
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<td>princess</td>
<td>four sculpted</td>
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<td>reprises</td>
<td>dasso-relievo</td>
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<td>cloth billows</td>
<td>infinite figure eights</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>so much movement</td>
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<td>illuminated furious</td>
<td>hooped</td>
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<td>barbed rock below</td>
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<td>cloth billows</td>
<td>blue-black wash</td>
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<td>illuminated furious</td>
<td>spirals intensely</td>
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<td>higher cloud</td>
<td>peach and pearl</td>
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<td>plump pinkish yellow</td>
<td>hair waterfalling</td>
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<td>velveteen wings</td>
<td>ankles</td>
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<td>puntuate</td>
<td>muscles dark</td>
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<td>fetishized</td>
<td>maid</td>
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<td>grecian gold</td>
<td>shoulders</td>
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<tr>
<td>plush pinkish yellow</td>
<td>hard tender round</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the garden

the house
presides
over its grounds
corkscrewing paths
eyws
stone arches
cawthorne and silkstone
churches
laburnum drips gold onto grass
workers’ cottages slouch
around back
crawling ivy
walls curved
beginning to buckle
wisteria climbs

a little girl
in a gingham school dress
asks
how long until christmas
log-rolls
the lawn
within the walled garden
forget-me-nots
fruit trees and bushes
gooseberry
plum
cherry

dandelion clocks
mallards strutting chests first
around the pond
lilac lemon rose
rhododendrons
stinging nettles
currant
hazelnut
nectarine
quince
forty varieties
of pear
laxton’s early market
pitmaston duchess
conference
last

*after auntie margaret*

walk towards the water
    the street that splits this city
    like a spine
downhill the same as south

    three-pronged pigeon prints
from when the sidewalk cement
    was wet

    a bauble of sun
refracted on a skyscraper      far off
the last of my grandmother's siblings has died
    says a sad-faced
    single-teared emoji
    in my inbox

five sisters
and a brother
    shot in monte casino

a red wreath halos
where his x marks the spot
on a mountain
    in a frame
    on the sill
i ring her

*a righ wun*
our margi
marrid t fella i brought ome from t forcez

sat at iz legz
in mi mumz frunt room
rolled up iz tweed trouserz
full suit e ad on

*luk at iz legz!*
shi sed
arent they airy!
ay yu evuh seen a pair ov legz az airy!
at seven pm she's
on t edge
or mi bed in mi nightie
lisping
teeth out
i can tell

a hedgehog rustles
foxes gallivant in the ginnel

lamppost light squints
through slits of shut curtains
  ovaltine skinning over
  in a nautically-striped mug

  dint want it tu be mi left til last
Notes and Acknowledgements

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“Last Child in the Woods” is in dialogue with Richard Louv’s book of the same title.

I entered into “fancy” via a quotation from Mary Ruefle’s “On Fear.”

The final stanza of “Now We Are Twenty-Six” sparked from a line in J.D. Salinger’s “Nine Stories: A Perfect Day for Bananafish.”

“muscle tension dysphonia” is a conceptual, found piece, comprised of the ingenious (and sometimes silly-sounding) exercises devised by voice specialist and singer, Lindsay Isaac-Lalla. Without her, I might have never sung again.

Frank Bidart’s “Ellen West” granted me permission to write the sequence “come clean.”

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