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every image of myself / Ashley Miranda

is as whimsical as the bruises on my thighs

what happened to my reflection? i ate it whole

chewing through negations
glass shards and all

first i consume the eyes

clawing through the cornea *puncturing through the sclera*
draining the fluid into my mouth
a concoction of salt and eye gel
and fear dripping
down my chin

then i gnaw at the edges of my face

caving in the skull and muscle, pulling it apart to the edges
gripping sinew through the holes in my teeth

consumption of reflection
is not consumption of self

it is triumph over shadows

{when we last spoke} / Ashley Miranda

dear violence masking as wildness,

i use to fantasize of kissing you
when you were a storm shaped by
chains

i remember the smog that kept me outside your door
asking me if i knew how to fuck

i wanted to say yes

you wanted me to feel
pathetic

so we could be a single string
fraying delicately.

do you still click and clack
against craniums
are you still a lust that collapses
the lungs?

maybe it's better to clean the echoes left on the wallpaper if
intimacy is a noxious hazard that bleed from your orifices

Inversion of Emerson / William Lychack

I dreamed that I floated at will in the great ether, and I saw this world floating also not far off, but diminished to the size of an apple. Then an angel took it in his hand and brought it to me and said, "This must thou eat." And I ate the world. [RWE]

You awoke on the tiny tip of a pin, attached against your will, blind to all but that pinpoint of fire, a vast emptiness beneath these nightmares of a boy. Then a demon took you by the needle and carried you down and said, "Open your mouth." And you opened like a dark void.

Case # 4167 (c) / Jennifer MacBain-Stephens

Dear Rory,

I want to go back to school. I won't make any money. Nothing I was ever interested in made money. But what's the point of anything then? I'm just trying to stay alive and cut one more head off. I'm just buying time. Should I read more headlines, move again?

Rory, I'll always keep your ID card in my pocket. I won't forget you. Your fear, your confusion. Your softness when I first saw you. What do we have if not soft eyes at first? I have to kill and be soft at the same time Rory.

I'll read you your card: Subject smothered in Tapeatern ally. ink forced down throat. Right arm and anterior pelvic bone severely injured. Lacerations on face. Identification neck tattoo: "Rory."

Rory, here are clean white sheets for you to soak up the ink coming out of your eyes.

Invertebrate / Rachel Franklin Wood

Red ant sorting a pile of severed parts
by degree of violence in the break,

I wish I weren't compelled to gather
all these limbs I don't need.

Is This Thing On? / Nate Logan

Satan's roundabout
turned out less scary

than the stump speech
made it sound. I practice

my touchdown dance in
every hot sauce dispensary.

Again, Steely Dan melts
like a snow cone over

my skull. Is this thing on?
Is there room for me in the rowboat

headed for shore? Isobel makes
the desert their own, unlike me.

Next week, an ice shelf will be
strapped to my back. At the time

it seemed fair. But here come
my doubts, loitering across town.

I Wear My Sunglasses at Night / Nate Logan

The list of side effects in the drug commercial makes me sleepy.
I never miss any feel-good story about drones.
Drinking from this inspirational coffee mug is the worst form of dread.

Summoning Mania / Jessica Morey-Collins

Hey bitch

I've dangled organ meats from my skin
offered my body to the raptors

a captive of piercing
cries hooked the raw glisten
to my flesh, bitch, listen—

I've glittered my lips and innards
flipped entitlement inside out

Have at these greasy drips
Have at this crimson

Bitch,

I ripped up sleep for you
scattered it through sieved fingers
gathered my pleas
to fling them meekly
at your feet Here is your treat of my flesh
 Here is my skull, your receptacle

I know you love me desperate
I've strung my 'yes' from branches and eaves
where it blesses the wind and the air-
conditioning I know you love me
desperate knee bleeding trailing
my slug wet
across the linoleum

I know you love me folded
limbs dragged through firmament
best when I come up gasping
from a pool
of my own fluids

Remember when you made love
feel like FunDip? I tongued
until buds rubbed off
thought they might not
grow back Remember

when you muted God and spun
thoughts like cotton candy
remember when you

[**CW – suicidal ideation**]

I'll Sleep When I'm Alive / Jessica Morey-Collins

Another year in which I didn't do it—submerge
in the river of sand, of syrup—unlearn breath
and vegetables—send space left
forever blinking. I won't bore you with methods,
they're plenty, bent light warbling
 eyes on a dry road
until I wept for water. I didn't want to be
born, thorn I dislodge daily, take meds,
 scrape on (and on). But still, I think
I might feel it again—grateful to be alive, the cool
abrasion of heel sand and an unplanned afternoon
lapping at the nectar of stars. And I'll be armed
 with love, real love, that I feel and don't
just know, unmuffled by my body's clench,
by the deadening of taste and color. Some blooms
open over night, photoreceptive proteins
having traveled to the tips of shoots to wait
 for a portent of light. Who am I
to lust after stability?—crafting assemblages of what
I've seen and survived, calling them Meaning,
Reason to Live, Self-Esteem, only to tear away
 any petals—why pretend the sum is greater,
that violence hasn't its knack for accretion. Still,
I believe the days will sweeten, sleep work free
from its root tangle and my thoughts will clean
 themselves, dark-gulping jewels
and foolishness—so as much as I want
to be I'm not through yet.

This is Not an Ekphrastic Poem / John Sibley Williams

An orphaned night sky slumps into middle distance
mountains.

Ours to recover just to lose again, the world
spins rapidly toward dawn.

If life is the sum of throb & hunger, something sacred
& final being

held up to the light & shown, naked, for what it is,
we are ready to surrender

our sovereignty over what was never really ours. Let go
of that small forever

we've carried cupped in our hands like a dead bird, like a
silent conch shell. When we lean in close to listen,

there is no ocean, no sky, no clumps of dry paint. No echo.

No canvas.

Included / Heikki Huotari

One or both of *bowling ball* and *ballroom* antiquated, from the ground down you were barely naked. One partition was induced by an equivalence relation then another. Parcel yourself out and find a screamer who agrees. Who gives this man, the messenger of God might ask, And who will be his mother? You were imitating song birds and you thought you had a dialog but they (and you) were sweetly sounding the alarm.

Unopened Bloom / Kendra Oakes Ferguson

pay attention when quiet things happen.

rothko pink on pink 1953, 16x32 print

layering our voices on top of each other,

a magnificent jello pie

i'm considering getting getting a tattoo that reads

“UNOPENED” across my forehead

also considering the idea of

not having a good time anymore

don't be sorry just be better

i whisper into my mostly-eaten

bag of jalapeño potato chips

from the comfort of my bedroom

everyone who loves you is asleep

the same candle burns for three hours

do you like how it smells

or did you just forget

what more do you want
than a landscape

brush your teeth drink your milk shave your head
do everything you're supposed to do
slip your voice in every pocket
of every coat you own

and go forth

Sexual Pollution / Kendra Oakes Ferguson

a body is not an ode
to petty theft
nor a certain distortion
to get at the truth
it tastes of
flash photography
on eucalyptus leaves
it looks like
or a saltine cracker
in an old man's mouth
i forgot my hair clip
i'm holding in a sneeze
sometimes my hunger
feels pornographic
all my life i've been
trying to sell unripe tomatoes
is there a google translate for having sex
am i in the wrong place
despite disarming
confidence
i am not your baby

but your babylon
me, and all the beautiful
women i know
levitate until we can't
levitate any more

preserver of life / Matthew Yates

i knew
i knew

the deluge
by the way

it talked
to me

hollow like
the universe
full of everything

its voice was tinny
flat & fragrant
when it asked if i were

Utnapishtim
what could i do

but pretend
to keep living

There's no magic to
my body, no
mystery. I say,

I feel fine.
I'm still young

(although the white-grey
strands that have extended
from my scalp are a diagnosis
all their own).

My birthday isn't for another
two weeks, but we still get
together for sandwiches
and soup and
conversation—

This time of year is usually
embedded in snow,
such dry air, but
we walk under

umbrellas and
awnings to avoid
the rain—

This is not what my
body is used to.
How can my brain
signal growth
in my core without
proper cold?

I can't explain my biology
(I'm just passing through).

I don't want to apologize for not
giving you more than just me.
I don't want to, but I will, and

I might even
mean it a little.

Leather / Kristin LaFollette

I smelled it,

leather

(like an airplane seat)

and thought—

A body of water,

(had it been nearby)

could have

helped you?

Flushed your wounds clear

of debris, the cold slowing

the

swelling?

Cleansed

the blood?

Dry weather, but not

quite like winter—

Had the ground been frozen,

your hot skin may have been

able to

take in

the

moisture

from the grass.

Had the ground been frozen,

you would have

died.

Results are Consistent with Other Studies / Jason
Dean Arnold

Every electrical device in our home needs to be checked
Again again again again again again again again again
Again again again again again again again again again
Again again again again again again again again again
Again again again again again again again again again
Again again again again again again again again again
Again again again again again again again again again
Again again again again again again again again again

Again.

The light switch doesn't know that it can't be controlled

With my mind; I stare at it, examine

Its resting position.

When I was a child, I would close my eyes to hold the image

As a temporary imprint on the insides of my eyelids.

Pentimento, trace, fleshy abstract, erase.

The beauty is in the longing, the lost.

I am losing everything everyday, in small moments, repeated

Again.

Again.

Again.

Trust the failure of memory.

Hear my heart give into being, my breath

Builds walls of a new home, a prison

Intimate, empty.

Don't leave me here inside myself.

Don't leave me.

I Brought You a Sweatshirt from Charlevoix, So for the
Love of God Don't Leave Me Today / Victoria Hudson

You've lost your head before. You know how it
goes: it starts with a lie that you believe.
Cold fingers and a placid shoreline. Ends

with me, headless. You, drunk in a Greyhound
station at 3 PM. I don't mean to
scare you. Swear I don't mean to hold you hostage.

I know you don't need this right now. Here are three
reasons you can't dump me: tomorrow's your
birthday, I need you, and I already

bought you this sweatshirt. You know what I mean.
Forget everything I've just told you.
I never know how to say it, but

Jesus Christ I love you to pieces. You
remind me of sand castles by the lake.

& I've always / Samuel J Fox

& I've always wished for pain mingled with the blood-rouse of pleasure but am too afraid that once I have aroused this shadowed lover this ambulated beast thrust hair-pull ass smack ruffian that it will become me spitting after smoking a cigarette or pulverizing conversation with a quick dismissal I want to be leashed I want to be handcuffed to something bigger than myself I want to be mounted into submission broken as though my heart were a wild stallion forced with saddle for the first time I had the chance to be wild and could not was a soft candy coin melted in the palm of my lover's hand instead, I grazed the moonlit field of her belly instead, I ate the fruit in her orchard sluiced with sweetness I entered her like a wind enters the hollow and we both howled and is that not enough? my manliness does not depend on the bestial ruination of another my manliness is soft malleable flexible I can be hard place when necessary and antlers above a flowing river exposing my slender neck to drink and I will not worry about gun retort it will come when it comes I will let my thirsty tongue want what it loves and I know that sex and death share a similarity like the moon reflecting the sun

At the Musarium (33) / Peter J. Grieco

[801 – 900]

Picture Indian Summer in America.
Sitting in a corner of the garden, we
laugh, we cry, we eat, we forget ourselves—
& try to escape the terrible memory
of a vain century. Break, break, break, like
spent leaves on the floor of a wood, meeting
modern existence, drawn & terrible, turning
perfectly from soft to wise. Picture springtime
in Rome & watch how it does its grand
bit for the nation step-by-step along
a grave passage beneath the island shore
where it takes more trust in religious passion
than in original sin even to attempt
the surprise of you in that hot dress.

[1801 – 1900]

I sang softly & forgot the horror.
I sang troubled & painted the flower
of melancholy. I sang of violence
& murder, frightened of fierce suspicion.
Ashamed, I sang of household profit. At
midnight I sang trembling with mystery.
With my finger down the throat of shining
fame, I wondered, setting down my gun, how
refuse, delay, & after pause, proceed?
How unfortunate regret, that her fatal
bosom should press mankind to waste
its estate on the reign of image & reputation.
Hence I sang, formerly & lately, not
with wit but with difficulties & thanks.

[2501 – 2600]

Fruits of gloomy contrast sharply crossing
the lively flow of discourse, the wondering
masses gazing at the feast, a bride of
eighteen persuaded by her teacher to
gather purple passages mingled with
magic verses, as simplicity of
motive returns earnestly in ruined
vanity: Admirable brethren lift
up thy dragged down charges & examine
every tendency towards vengeance, what
Spaniards whisper & what Lincoln condemned,
in the respectable construction of
obedience relieved of independence,
of structure conceived as perfection.

[21701 - 21800]

Unbind a monkey's sophistication—
& the outflow is moonrise. Leverage
heartstrings, & vitreous farrier will
astound even Shiva. Sheared gears
sag, but the old coot remains
a fatalist. All-night weaning, Anglo-
Norman acceding, soporific blackamoor
disagreeing, taffeta whirligig adverting
the semi-fireproof exegesis
of eclogues that rankle a sweaty
purgation beside some di-symphonic
merry-go-round of obesity. Never
inflate what GNP portends, even when
melodic mosquitoes sprawl seaward.

CONTRIBUTORS

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