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Write the Body Bloody

by Rachael Elliott

A selection of poetry
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree

of

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in English

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Write the Body Bloody

Write the Body Bloody

At the back of the body is a label that says "This body belongs to..."

There is no name in the gap.

I would write my own name

but no matter how I stretch I cannot reach

the neck grows strained and pinched with trying

and I trust no one to write it for me.

No one will know who owns the body if it is lost

it will exchange its tag for a Jane Doe labelled toe

and be explored by med students.

The body has a secret name which not even I can know

How does one look at a tiny child and see their name blooming from them?

Men who glimpse letters from the body's name make its world spin

but none has scooped it with his tongue and poured it in my ear

Some have not even looked for the name

but named the body themselves

(which the body does not care for)

Names which the body cannot forget

Names tattooed through the body's skin onto bone

'gorgeous', 'bitch', 'honey', 'slut'

It is hard for the body to move with these names cracking in its joints.

Perhaps its true name is so long that no one will ever read it
or it is tattooed near its spine
curving black brushstrokes beneath its skin
pulsing in the red blood of its pages
perhaps that is how the man with the fists
saw part of the body's name and used it
to keep me locked to him, longing.

By spilling the blood of the body
with his hard centre
wiping it from his body with such care
I couldn't help but think he knew its name
and would not share.

The body has a currency of touching
and a market for parts
lips go for a kiss
legs for a stroking
vagina for the voice that cracks the body open
and grunting, sews it together with purple thread
but what costs the body the most
are the things left behind

The body is not a rubbish bin
but a receptacle for needles
marked 'Hazard' and painted the colour of warning
people want to take the needles away
clean the plastic bottom of the body
with sour disinfectant
but they are afraid of where the body has been
so it grows larger with sharpness
and no one will touch it for the brokenness within.

The body is afraid of pain, but craves it
if I do not provide
the body will create its own pain
so for years I cut the body
with the blade of a blue pencil sharpener
and while I passed out the body danced
flicking blood into the shadows
and we were friends.

Then I could not slice the body anymore
but I knew it needed hurt
so I scratched the body with a pin
but it scowled at me and punished
my lack of commitment to the body's pain.

I forced the body to lash out

so I bled after three months of not bleeding
and its gift to me was washed away in the tide
I did not give the body the opportunity again.

The body practices its relationship with violence
but weakens in the final moments
crumpling to the dirt
shaking, clammy
it leaves me to clean up its messes
and makes choices before I can think
the body puts me places I shouldn't be
like amidst a bar brawl
arms up, swinging
before I realise I've crossed the room
and my friend saves me from the body
and I am left spent as though the body has run a great
distance
wishing she had let the body go
so I would not have to hurt the body myself
only search through the blood for its name

The body will love no one until they learn its name
but it's not telling
so I lie cold in bed with it
in dread with it

clean sheets shushing over shaved legs

lavender pillow against its head

and wait for the body to kill me

as I am nothing to it.

The body knows no sorry

knows no fear

the body exists with animal blood

running from between its teeth and hands

and gasping wet

dies without permission

Head on Side

Head on Side

Woman in pink:

Woman looking upwards

Woman in a short skirt

waxed

legs sprayed orange

Woman playing with the dishwater

yellow gloves

nostrils, pinched

Woman throwing away letters

holey knickers

dead flowers.

Woman, head on side, contemplating art

Woman in red:

Woman sitting

Woman holding a police hat

a white daffodil

six highlighters,

three yellow, one purple

Woman reading

Woman listening to Eminem

Woman dancing naked,

smelling her fingers

staring at her shadow writhing on the wall

Woman in green:

Woman staring at a dead cockroach.

Woman upside down,

drying her hair

crying

Woman on her knees

scrubbing blood

from the shower

Woman in yellow:

Woman making the bed.

Woman waving to her enemy

Woman retracting a statement

no sir

I was mistaken

Woman shuffling

Woman treating herself

wallet open

white cream

Woman's face drawn in,

without a mouth,

eyes closed.

Enamel

enclosed in pink

I slice my way through

squash down on hard baked rusks

tear free

test my edge on nipples,

cucumber and sweet peas

months later

I am growing a better me

far inside

but fever burns a hole in my replacement

not to be seen for seven years

my defect caves inward

brown stained reminder

of sweat and fears

years later

I break at this seam

on the handlebars

of a blue and black mountain bike

I snap and bury a piece of myself in a lip

paint myself red

fly into the dirt

under a tiny kauri tree

leech into the soil

pull up through the roots

splay out on a branch

My emergency repairman is late for golf

he fashions me a yellow brick hat

to cover my sharp edge

sends me to heal under a fleshy blanket

days later

my regular guy

trims my hat back

rasps sharp edges

puts me in a firing line

buffs me clean

years later

I tremble over a glass of water

split in half the other way

not short, but thin

behind the shine

a flake of myself floats away

and no one

notices

horse shoe nails

the foal trying to get

amniotic fluid from its ears

am i the

last words you said to me

your disapproving looks

the barnacles on the bottom of your boat, slick

with slime

I am

the endangered

species.

am i the language you tell your kids off for using

I am

the thing you left behind once

I am your anal retentively arranged bookshelf;

smallest to smallest

the royal

blue rat bait

the convolvulus choking your grapevine

the fistful of ribbons: paced and mannered,
maiden,

best presented

I am the clean fish tank

I am your accidentally intentional slit wrists.

am i the willows bending

to lick the earth?

I am the vertigo of a broken pot plant tipped
over child's ripped artwork

I am

listening to you

am i

Junk Store Girl

The back room smells of

Pledge and regret.

Cabinets hang without their

glass

finishes marred

by 2cent stickers

covered in black ink

to mark their worth

The shop has clothes

from 94 different houses

bringing 94 different dusts

and the skin from

countless others

hiding in the seams.

Each garment

is a story that no one will hear

but you can smell them if you

lean close and breathe quietly.

They waft in, bags

tied with knots

bags split

bags flow over

clothes drip from the bins

try to slip their secrets

but people stuff

shove

smash them in.

I bought a denim jacket once

with a stitched on label

and artful rippings.

There was \$20 and an empty

plastic baggie in the

inside pocket.

No one asked her story.

I loaded my car with Grandma's

white woollen jacket

and her basket of silk scarves.

I wanted her stories for myself

but they would not tell.

My lover wears

chatty clothes with

neck stained collars

He makes their stories his own.

He quit me
to live there with them
in the past.

The only heartbeat I hear
is the one that slips beneath
the music
from the shadow box.

My toes are on the edge.

Today I bought
a handmade purple dress
tailored to my form.

I wondered if a mother loved
her daughter
and made it herself

I wondered if it had commission.

I wondered if the girl who gave it up
was quit too.

The only thing you ever brought me
was a necklace from the rubbish pit
where you scavenge people's pasts.

It quit someone to find me
swing from my neck
tangle in my hair

My clothes wear someone else
and hide their stories in me until I am
filled with black lettered clicking.

Nailed

I bend backward

break

below the quick

and blood becomes my hair

I clip myself

on your doors

bags

and broken locks

I paint myself

to blend

a coloured mask

to hide beneath

I file myself

down

in the bottom drawer

under k

I hoard

pieces of my day

around me

to pack the hollow I hide

I want to sink into your skin

pool blood there

stain myself red

ready

re-do

start over

with ice water

to make me set

concrete

so you can't chip

at what I have left

My body is a Christmas toy: batteries not included

My body is not your empty Chinese takeout

your lollypop stick

your bitter gladwrap

chipped mug

It's not the hair tangled in your brush

dragged out, flung

through the window

bird stolen for a

bed

My body is

not your

disease.

My body is not your foot soldier,

your panting dog,

your drunk arrestee

your sullen student

It's not your lipstick stained

cigarette butt,

pink glow fading

rolling along the

gutter

My body is

not your part time job.

My body is not my mother

or my father

or your mother

or your ex

It's not your rolled ankle

your knitting bones

your skinned

elbow

My body is

not your gravel rash.

My body is not your canvas

your wet clay

your puzzle pieces

or your kit set model

It's not your exam paper

your driving test

your politics essay

My body is

not your final mark.

My body is not yours.

My body is a sweat stained sheet

amniotic foal

bonfire smoke

wave bolting down a beach

It's a black stained rock

road paint

liquid absolution

hot wax

But

your body is not my priest.

It's not my author

my boss

my doctor

or my garbage truck.

Your body is my batteries

A Murder Every Month

(after *Childless Woman*)

I pull hair
build my nest
strand red by red strand
but no egg

not even a cuckoo
strokes through
the birds murder me
every month
with their singing

my head smooths itself
beneath the fallen leaves
they place a rock
and my name
on my chest

I can't breathe

Each rejected acorn
rattles down
leaves a stain that sprains

fray your nail
with your teeth

gnaw it until it
bleeds, water me dilute
with your bloodied saliva

I can't breathe

when the blades come
unprepared

I'll slip my skull

your boxed breath

lie naked, chipped

spread wide

for chickens to pick over

to harden their eggshells

and their legs

My nest was warm once

then the tree shook

ripped out its branches

flicked it free

I learnt

a nest blown down

continues to cheep

for days

Milking

Hole in gumboot leaks

chills toes one by one

apple moon hangs overhead

for picking

her silver palm cups

your head

as I never did

taste ozone

calves cry

shiver in their shed

your heartbeat

echoes in my gut

I freeze, head up

in the paddock.

You picked me, ripe

red as water

teeth grind in the shadows

as cows gnaw their cud

I feel you again

slow diving star to star

liver to lung

slow somersaults
the darkness shifts
into one tail swishing mass
under my skin
the herd heats me
as they stumble through
the pitted gateway

tears form
a milky smear
across the black blue sky

The ruru sings to you
my lullaby
as the gate is latched

She is the Cat's Mother

Queen's whiskers draw salt
from the moon
leaves it black
she sleeps
claiming everything with her fur
eats from my plate
kneads my armpit
with her claws
She is growing herself inside
waiting for her mirrors
to begin breathing
she tears the sac
hiss
salt spits across the glass
she sands it clean
stares at herself in triplicate
one white
one black
one stunted red
white kitten cannot hear
ears snipped
with blue tattoos

she climbs inside
poinsettia flower boxes
to line herself in pollen
and the smell of wet potting mix
bees flock to
make her sweeter
but her honey is hidden inside

blind black kitten
shut in the closet
curled under a scarf
waits
He feels air suck past
as the door pulls open
bolts
feet sliding,
headfirst into the wall
he cannot see
anything but light
bursting behind his eyes
the smallest has a lisp
long fur
Kali paws
red

the mother licks

licks

cannot take her colour

she takes her by the nape

drags her from the nest

leaves her under a

blackberry bush

She stalks from her red daughter

turns from the black kit

shaking his head

to raise only the palest

with her licking

Today I did not bake

Today I did not bake a cake; I tried.

sifted flour a puff of lies, dusting hands and bench

sugar shards cajoled underfoot, escapee sweetness

broken defences and scrambled eggs, confused, obliterated.

against instruction, vanilla essence, a cloying splash of

rebellion

mixed and mixed and changed into something more than the

sum of its parts

one lick of the spoon

one glorious tongue stinging swipe

forbidden syrup

cocoa's bitter face seeks broken teeth penalty

tendrils poking at the tender spots

Baking powder tingles up your tongue

synapses burst in a rush of saliva

temptation lingers

corner of mouth glued together

lick the bowl: painted nose.

Today I did not bake a cake.

Tomorrow I won't make the icing.

in the dark
so the rays of my lover
cannot stroke
 or help me spread
I'll wait
patient
 breathing
 eyes closed
 for my moment

I am a weed
I grow, forbidden
I flower, inconvenient
independent
under the shade
of gorse
that scratches faces

a weed
is like a
woman

 beautiful
but doesn't know its place

The Point

(after Mark Strand)

I give up my hair which soaks up the dew.

I give up my forehead, fresh wet sand.

I give up my eyes, a slipknot noose.

I give up my nose, a chunk of pumice.

I give up my lips, helium balloons.

I give up my teeth, the cage of my voice

I give up my tongue.

I give up my throat, a wall for graffiti.

I give up my heart, a greaseless gear box

I give up my lungs to your pipe.

I give up my smell which is of bread rising

I give up my shoulders.

I give up my hands that flutter with words.

I give up my stomach, where the possum lives.

I give my navel to your knife.

I give up my thighs which refuse to look at each other.

I give up my buttocks, wet smears of paint.

I give up my vulva and the voice that is quietened there.

I give up the bra that holds my chest together.

I give up my skin, leaves crackling underfoot.

I give up.

There is no one left inside my clothes

You can have none of it

Inappropriate Gifts

Silver seams

wax blue string tied

burst with helium words

they cannot say

slip, bunt the ceiling

'get well

soon'

you shine, swell

in the light

that flicks through the window

the way you could

I want to bury you

in my closet

behind my little black dress

behind the thick white coat

I couldn't bury Grandma in

(even though she was cold)

so your seams won't fade

shrink

or wrinkle

but even if

I hide you

behind all of my skins

you will still

die

but slowly

you will shrink

until you are a silver puddle

deflated

as a tear

Disposable Barbie

I am Disposable Barbie.

my hair is haystack blonde

No matter how long you hold

me underwater

I just can't drown

my hair stays dry

and waveless.

I am Sink-hole Barbie.

you leave me on the steps

and the Labrador

decides to see how I taste

(the oreo you tried to feed me)

my body sinks beneath

the black dog's teeth

I break the way I was intended.

I am Matinee Barbie.

A fly lands

on my painted lips.

I can't blow it away

only feel its feet

stroke me as it hunts

through my lipstick

for food.

I am Mannequin Barbie.

Your mother finds me

and, triumphant

removes the scars I fought for

by unsnapping my head with a pop

and chasing a less loved doll

to steal a flawless body from.

I am Restless Barbie

and I see everything.

My veins are extruded plastic

the same as everyone else

I cannot sleep.

You dressed me again and again

then left me face down

naked

on another androgynous plastic belly.

You painted my face.

You cut my hair.

I am Disposable Barbie

my legs are bent

locked open wide

to serve you

But the pose I was given

makes me

useless

except for the thing you're tired of.

I'm not Housewife Barbie.

I'm not Career Barbie.

I'm not Proposal Barbie.

I'm not even Autonomy Barbie.

I am Disposable Barbie.

And the thing that ended me was hope.

I dream

I dream of pigs

digging up the roots of me

pink snouts hunger, quest

demanding

I fall under the chestnut tree

see them loom

they block the filtered sunlight.

I dream of pigs

huge and lolling

fit to burst

bodies stressed beyond endurance

fixed in place by greed

mouths brim

they die stuffed and sad

I dream of pigs

their wet dead smell

and sweet putrid shit

they barge past me

knock me down

eat my hands to the elbow

leave me empty

I dream of pigs
twee and spry
kittens slurp from the bottle
fit my tea cup, snooze my pocket pigs
asleep in a cradle
fill my heart
a lie

I dream of pigs
devouring slush
gobble, fart
smash it down
hunger, need, desire
they never stop
eat all of me

I dream my Nana looks after the pigs
I dream my Father kills them with sucking blows of his
hammer
I dream my Mother collects all of the pigs and puts them on
her mantel
I dream my Brother eats them with apple sauce

I dream of pigs
they never dream of me.

Masks

I carry a golden shield
and a sword pointing downward
two birds tell me secrets
while three touch the moon
the ochre tipped horn
of the oxen cradles

I hold the feather of justice
and never look happy about it
knelt upon my pedestal
in a grey tunic

I stare through you

I am the lady of the beasts

I hold pregnant court
the bear nuzzles
the wolf's head sinks to my knee
as all the phases of the moon lick me
the lioness stands guard

I fold my wings over an infant and a corpse
the infant is latched to my gold nipple
the corpse sleeps covered in the tide
Horus hanging in the sky

brings his lady words

but my eyes are closed

I am creased in the centre of my lotus

with children in my hair

my eyes glare from

palms

feet

forehead

and dangle from my ears

I of the red palms

red soles

all woman

rise

infant skulls click my rhythm

the grabbing hands of the men

who tried to touch me

flicker about my hips

my red tongue pours from my mouth

I dance my refusal

hair a volcano of flowers

shackled to the sky

Lashed

I'm the laced gatekeeper
of the salt
water woven fast
but, I drip
I fail again and again

I bend
the black stains my leaks
for all to see
the darkened tracks
soak into my cream fields
killing all the buttercups

she clamps me
between her metal teeth
grinds me
into better curves
corset fastened
I am rearranged
in silhouette

She'll never see
the pieces of me
set adrift
on the lake of herself
forcing swollen waves to leak
her curse

She scratches me with nails
swipes at me with coloured cotton
trying to paint herself bigger
over the bruise
I've become
but I'm beyond repair
hinges broken
swung wide open
I groan in the wind
propped on a stone
rusting

Packages

(after *The Couriers*)

The wind howling
through the chimes
and the lock hole?

It is not mine.

Do not capture it

to power

any other

vinyl netted

singing.

A copper vulva in a blue

and yellow box?

Do not accept it.

It is a poor copy

of a genuine woman

who knits.

Two rings of silver with nipples in them?

Masks. Masks and a love

lurking beneath

a skin shirt.

A silicone cup for furtive bleeding?

Lies. Lies and an avowal

against creeping scents

and holistic cheering.

A second skin to cover me?

Refuge and a shelter

for mud to stick to

and warming stomachs.

The wind opens my book

sounding out letters to steal.

The mother cuts her baby's hair

to turn him into a frog.

The mercury flows back together.

The waves breathe.

A kiss, a kiss, you won't let me

fall down.

Two Narcissists Walk into a Bar

Co-dependence

(After Kate Braverman)

The women are graceful with quills and fear

They dance to keep their feet planted

one in a puddle

one in the cupboard

The women buy each other pink musk bubble bath

cap the bottle

with a diamond

They lace themselves behind the wheel

of utilities

lick abandonment

kill cockroaches with blue vapour

laugh with winking teeth

The women are vibrant with stockings and

downcast eyes

reaching for the cookie jar

getting handfuls of Persil

the last card instead

They dress as a mannequin missing a hand

in camouflage

leopard print, striped zip

lucky mother forgot that day

once is enough

for hairless weeping

They are coping

They are coping

The men are spiced with cologne and throw away

compliments

dark denim empty shelf single jandal

last night's glitter in their beds

They too, wear their father's ashes

in silver around their necks

They too, hear the tide washing out

and try to fill it with beer

They are coping

They are coping

The men, stained with orange street lights buy women

to weep in

to cover in pearls and black stretch satin

with arms to wrap their teeth around

shrug off

shun

The men burn the night

against the steel doorframe

with cricket eyes

smoke rising from their fingers

This woman is first aid saline

dripping

she removes her hands

to prevent accidental touching

She is spectacular in last night's make up

black rings cover the bruise to follow

The woman waits behind an orange pillow

cradled to her chest

to prevent coughing

and tries to forestall leakage

The woman is frivolous with silence

and baking

she downloads rejection

one card at a time

her ipod is smashed

the night paints itself over her eye

The woman breathes nerve electric

she is memorable in feathers

She takes her lips and nails to bed

pinkblue

She is coping

She is coping

The woman does not murmur lullabies

or accept cut flowers

Her selves fight each other

in a paddling pool mirror

The woman knows what it is to cross last

she knows what it is to bleed, blue shadows

She expects it

She is coping

She is coping

The woman belongs to no one

unmarked by gold

she creaks backward on the swing seat

nauseas

The woman sighs pinecones

and a man burns them for kindling

She sings knitted melodies

he gathers kindling

splits nails

The woman inserts garlic into a lamb's leg

the man picks the meat from the bone.

She's alone.

The man sweats through last night's sheets

The woman pushes scrambled eggs around a plate

she pours vodka and glitter into her mouth

and pants

He's alone.

The woman sweats through last night's sheets

he brings her warm towels

drives home

breathing addresses out the window

she re-reads old letters

he salts her dinner

limes her glass

he kisses her beneath her eye

her forehead

her ear

he kisses her hair

billowing through his fingers

she kisses his mouth

his thumb

his fear.

They are burning.

They are burning.

Cleanout

The first box smells
sweeter than wet newspaper
drag it under the light
earwigs crouch
top layer of cardboard peels off
like skin
ridges soften underneath
old magazines eaten
by acidic snails
frame a self in pink
sealed sections
how to keep a man happy
the word 'breathe'
looks wrong
I don't remember how
to stare at a mirror in a dark room
trying not to pick pimples
The second box flies
into my hands
I cannot see over its lightness
friends for every year, louder
lie over each other

brown the shade of 16
teeth soft, still felt
white of 4 worn into grey freckles of 9
but vivid eyebrows are permanent
small Dalmatians
corners missing
I remember the price of everything
close the lid
write "to go"

The third box opens
on a field of fleece
unpeel its membrane
for a frog, cool in my hand
as I crouch in the pool
fish flicking my calves
porcelain chips fall and click each other
at the bottom of the box
stroke presents from women
I cannot name
but every time I cry
I smell their lavender shoulders
I set aside my first yellow fence
two locked diaries to break into

handmade denim pencil case

red zip for keeping

I leave the snakeskin behind

he can't find his tail

for eating

feed the boxes left behind

into the fire

of the rusted barrel

only one translucent container

to fill

magazines melt from my eyes

the ash of my childhood

covers everything

I am grey

but shoots of green

peep through

No Daddy

do you remember the day I called you a stranger?

in the autumn sun outside the Mobil station

Would you like a ride in the white van little girl?

I said I didn't accept rides from strangers

People were watching

Maybe I shouldn't have uncovered my father's nakedness

perhaps someone had to because

I didn't recognise you then

through the black.

But today you're my Dad

and you're an old man now

the 12 years since hang heavy in your face

they shake in your hands

you're just as scared as me

I'm not harmless

but I use words not fists

maybe they hurt just as bad.

I have a million questions

but I am afraid

You say I haven't missed much

things with you are just the same

but how can you not know that

You

missed

everything.

You threw me away Daddy,

I fell down jib stairs with my rain stained bag

legs lay heavy in the agapanthus bed

smashed brains pattered out my ear

painted pain in pink lines

now I can't think anything real

I am nothing to you

I fell out Daddy

from a Glasgow kiss

by the bleach spattered skull

of the horse who follows me

black holes danced in my eye

as rain kissed my face

the earth roared up to meet me

to drag me further down

I spun out Daddy
I fell flat on the stage
the nailed heels of the dancers
stabbed through my pretence
my liver ran laps
as lights swirled in my lungs
I blinked and blinked
but nothing moved
in the heaving mass of oblivion

I went east Daddy
the wheel slid from my grip
blurred green and black smear
whirled past my face
I saw my eyes narrow
I forced the pin drop
slammed to a stop
with my heart and my hands

I made it Daddy
I streaked through the sky
smoke blurred from the wheel
when I hit the concrete river
I stepped into the other

read grey but said silver
belonged in non belonging

I cut my hair Daddy
I slit my plaits
with the green carving knife
from ear to waist
the past drifted to cover my breasts and thighs
but was blown away with the tide
and the molten caramel breath
of the man who won't love me.

I sang sugar Daddy
my pinkie nail splintered
on the club that you left me with
my red hips swung sideways
I dropped lollies from my left hand pocket
I dropped hope from my right

I turned 21 Dad
I ripped my wrist
with a pair of orange handled scissors
the same colour as the spoon
that broke me when I was 10
I bled my childhood
over the limestone driveway

it fell like the leaves from the willows you cut down
skirling like knives in the wind again, again.

I graduated Daddy

I was laid out on a winter's lawn in the streetlight
by a man who would own my body but not my soul
would I had gained a wild animal's trust

I drowned myself in vodka

I leapt out of my mouth
onto the bark of a persimmon tree
but had to go back again, again.

I grew up Daddy

I fell off the swing
my hands are bloody
my heart is cracked
you weren't watching me
and now you want this to never have happened
but it did
a pink skirted girl child never again, again.

Look at my scars, they're real

I see them shining in the mirror every morning
dew dipped spider webs
across my everything
they glitter, but they aren't pretty

they gleam like the knife
splitting my skin again, again.

I did the hard part myself

Did you miss it?

Reunion

In the driveway Poppa stoops
three hairs placed over head
hands stretched with arthritis
a cracked painting
banging in the wind
he doesn't touch me
his regimental rose garden
now blanketed in weeds
cat shit in the corner
dead shrubbery
where am I?

Nana's habitual grimace
made larger by lost weight
drags the corners of her mouth down
jowls of evil
a creaking umbrella
she sees everything
covers everyone
but me
next generation squats on her knee
drooling the unsayable
crams it in with a fist

blue blank baby eyes

focus on dusty light fittings

What do they see?

walls have slithered inward

I remember this room as bigger

they seem to pulse

shove us together

unlikely ninepins

shuffling closer

if one tips

we all fall

there is no one to catch me

I'll land beneath them

suffocate

no one will notice.

elderly uncles have lost their sight,

their hearing

and their tact

black walking stick clenched

brown ortho shoes

One stranger says that he can see

whose daughter I am

my treacherous face

should I wish
I wasn't stamped with my maternity?
how can I feel so guilty
for something that was given to me?

Your wife hangs back
then knives in determined
awkwardly hugs me
says my hair smells nice
she caresses its length

I will it to snakes
to strike her presumption
but it shushes past my ears
I rear back
eyes shut tight
safe for the moment.

We try to bond over
fluffy yellow ducks
smiley spotty horses
caught inside our cell phones
but I see the kids Dad raised instead of me
and his ex wife looks back at her
we sit on the velvet sofa
worn to threads over the stuffing

looking at anything
but each other's faces.

I thought it would be easier
the shadow sheep
I peep out from behind two babies
born out of wedlock
one a shock to everyone
slithered out on the bathroom floor
stained the tiles, the lives red
while my legs stay stubbornly shut
but even a child conceived in wreaths of meth
has a cherub face
Oh how well behaved they are
so quiet
Granny lust burns the unpleasant parts away
all that is left is the baby
no one cares how it got here
Am I the only one wondering why it is so quiet?
P baby pees, does it think?

And you
Stub the driveway with one foot
naughty boy, caught
sullen teen sinking car wheels

into the mask of front lawn
clueless man
looking for keys in kitchen cupboards
finding only broken glass
spread on the floor like honey
oblivious
you charge through
crunching me underfoot
then offer me a cup of tea
in a chipped white mug
I take mine
the same way as you
so maybe I'm your daughter
after all.

Hedge

(After *Elm*)

my grandfather winks and loses an eye

no one notices.

it rolls between my legs into the gutter

he reaches from his coffin with wet paper hands

begs me to take his death picture

no smiling

he flaps around my ankles

as I

lean,

lean

lean

away

a sweater lies, panting

in my shadow

coloured ladies flit to my shoulder

to dig their pincers in

pull my hair out

one strand at a time

to lacquer the ground

I stretch my fingers
stroke hot concrete
my limits burn, bleach yellow
you want me to keep them out
shriek when I keep them in
you cut me
down to a stump
and roots

a feathered whiteness shelters beneath me
they plant their futile children
in my softness
to rot
beneath their shells
for boys to fling
for cats to crack

inside me, an itch has made its home
it pecked itself
a splintered place to hide at night
I feel its fur turn
brush against me
the rhythmic thump
of its leg
scrabbles

keeps me awake

I feel it gnaw at its edges

scuttle my skin

I bloom

the itch eats me

the whiteness steals my colour

joins the other painted ladies

draped in my hair

children pick me

lick their hands

reach between my legs

for my Grandfather's eye

spit

shine

eat it whole

Two Narcissists Walk into a Bar: One Child Walks Away

1. *When I was born*

10 days late

I'm an overcooked egg

boiled white flesh

should have been perfectly smooth

but one scratch

tears it apart

you told her you loved me more

so I am white and red and flaking.

She never forgave me

and you forgot.

While the apple peel

stretched from her red fingers

you taught me to be silent

and beautiful.

She often placed her hand

over my chest

pressed down

then ran to

nebulise my breathing

The mother of the sickness

collected meat dishes

to smother in glad wrap

freeze for later

feet

up thawing

2. Prescriptions

This syrup

for better breathing

eats teeth

but this jab

for painless pulling

fixes that

and you have another

white wall

to grow

anyway.

This powder

for better breathing

breeds tongues

but this pill

for green killing

fixes that

either way
you have another
sixteen years
to practice
the art
of closing
your mouth.

3. Birthday presents

4. Visiting

She speaks for an hour
about melted candles
shitty nappies
homosexual flings
then demands my pages

He builds a fence
to keep the sheep in
reconciles his bank statements
chops wood for
a daughter less bloody than me
then waves me away

with his teeth

in place

5. *Advices*

Take a deep breath

6. *Education*

You congratulate me on my

Masters degree in

husband hunting

because you say I need a man

to take care of me.

You say true love is

admitting your place in the world

but I say

it's up all night fucking

to Nine Inch Nails

filling the bed with

the blood of our biting.

7. *Sorry*

I wear my skin

the wrong way out.

Everything itches.

Clothes stick
in all the wrong places
and my voice is only heard
inside my lungs
where it bounces around
looking for somewhere to hide.

It is only once I shed my skin
in sleep
that my lips open
the murmuring
becomes a roar
that cascades down my face

8. *Not Sorry*

Last night I woke up coughing
with my man's hand
between my thighs
as though it belonged there.

His mother raised him
to never speak ill
of another's parents.
So he just looks me in the eye
takes my keys
and drives us home

Mouse

I am the itch that lives in the wall

my tail flicks

inside the helmet box

I am here, counting seconds

while she becomes

fragmented

her bed lies empty

for hours

food wilts on the shelf

and I cannot eat it all

she lays

blue polar fleece sheets

to catch the skin

cracking from her nipples

for later

hangs her wet caked skins

from a white rail

leaves them long after they're dry

the vulva she wears

is held together with glue

and copper wire
laced over where he's been
she admits to nothing.

I eat uncooked rice
it swells in me
blue
I scratch with my right foot
that tangles
in the hair behind my ear

She calls me Rustle
for the noise I make
opening the packages
in her cupboards
to save her from her craving

I call her nothing
we brush against each other
chasing baby crickets
that somehow land on their feet
every time they fall

she wants me dead
she sets poison
traps around her hallway

but licks them herself
when she thinks no one is looking

I eat the rat bait for her.

It makes everything
too bright
every sound is a car
redlining as it spins
my ears grow cold
listening to the air leave my body

I leave my tail behind.

It is hard to move my fingers
my stomach
is a block of dry ice
that cracks
streams
and pops its lid

I tuck my legs
inside my body
slip
behind the fridge
make conversation with
the dust bunny that hides there
and begin to dry

Pins

in the dark

colours blench

try three keys

jingle

scratch

before you find

one that fits

hear it click.

wind chimes

brush and drip

hot rust

The lock is greased

welcome home

beneath your feet

let yourself through

groan to drown

the floorboard's pant

and sing

in the shadow of the door

a single daffodil

bends, weary

no flowers
in the dark
in the rain
I am dirt
beneath your hands

this door
is never locked
porch unswept
paint
chipped
and hidden beneath your stone
in duplicate
are keys
that make me useless

call the locksmith
turn inside me
grind
until all my pins fall out

Bareback

Dirt moves faster
than hooves
comes to you
demands kisses
the blood's your fault
you climbed on
after all

You'll never understand
true love
unless you knot the rope
no spurs
no whip
saddle
bridle
bit
no blurred
bareback

He must accept his girth
the galls chafe
his job is to carry your
paper thin dream

your crossed legs

your carcass

You must accept your helmet

your sweat spills

your job is to feed him

your height

your hair

your hide

Climb on ex-jockey

walk around the orchard

climb down

watch him admiring apples

find them hidden

in his pocket later

smell their juice on him

do not cry

only at Christmas

will he wear your bells

without complaint

smile until your face breaks

for this small mercy

forget

you ever rode so fast

the world blurred

bareback

hearts beating

across the dirt

This Bruise has Teeth

This Bruise has Teeth

Lover, when did you last

let go your fist?

tread softly

I am underfoot

I want to be selfish

let me

take your finger between

my teeth, wrap

my tongue around it

suck

keep your mouth shut.

It won't mean a thing

The internet says
a selfish partner
is the best kind
close your eyes
I can't concentrate
with the pulse in your wrist
wrapped in my hair

It will just be a moment
in the album
of moments
glued down

touch me in anger
it takes two to tell
and this bruise has teeth

Man standing, holding a balloon

Under your hand

everything is red

your lips poised above me

words waiting

to blow me down

your breath stale, humid

peanuts, candyfloss, beer

steals mine

In the hands of your child I rattle

bounce

there is no floor for me

At first

I leap and twist

in your inflated castle

I am grown young

but now

my hands pucker

I lack the

short memory of a child

and soon my stomach rolls and heaves

Darling,
I am tired of smiling
I press against the sides
they slide and squeak
beneath my fingers
I cannot pinch
or pry my way out
I wonder
will I burst?
Your breathing swallows me
until, stretched to breaking
I pop and am free
gasping, cold in the light
or will you place me
in the bottom of your dark closet
for keeping
forgotten
except for flashes
and your words will shrink around me
until there is nothing left but my wrinkled skin
& the photograph of you
holding me by a string

head bent to the hessian

over

under

through

slip

handed her hood

she

smiles

tilts her head

back

presses gristle

deep into her mouth

soaks it on her tongue

tastes dust and sweat

she can't have it both

so she ties the knot instead

Drunken Villanelle

Slip in the door and start your drinking
hands stretched reaching, feeling blinded
burn away the pain and thinking

Feel the fire deep, still sinking
pretend your lover never minded

Slip in the door and start your drinking

Taste the tears you fear she's faking
search for nothing and you'll find it
burn away the pain and thinking

Gift the thirst that you are slaking
take her eyes so she is blinded

Slip in the door and start your drinking

Stroke the flesh that you keep breaking
kiss her face and be reminded
burn away the pain and thinking

Match the noises that she's making
louder so she'll know you tried it

Slip in the door and start your drinking
burn away the pain and thinking

Shell

It is the third day since I quit you.

I open the carton

like a cat checking for feathers

there is one egg left

condensation glues it

between thumb and fingertip

and the sound of my belly

belies wholeness.

I lift, feel the bottom unhinge itself

and the mucous flutter

from my stomach into the groove

where the shell was

an echo

now light in my hand

I am a moon with no ocean

Disjointed

The young woman

eyes wet

thighs thick

hips swinging

carries a sword

and ponamu

neither is permitted

so he removes them

her legs are popped off

seed pods

left to lie

under a blue moon skirt

until the day she takes the

sheep's jaw bone

and ties it to her waist

then

her hair becomes a feathered plume

to hide her breasts

as he suckles

her hands become a bowl

that will never hold enough water

her face becomes an anemone

unsure

stagnant

sucked in when stroked

she dries

and dries

children nest

in her head twigs

her nose

grown long from lies

hardens to a beak

her face is a map

of bargaining

she's bought herself a chalice

and filled it with wine

bleeding time

he gives back her sword

her ponamu

but she cannot lift them

she is beneath the peach tree

not in it

hands running

with juices

Welt

I boil an egg
to hear it rattle
inside the pot.
It wants to escape
but I know I can swallow
it in two bites
if I think about something else.

It's a good boil.

Loud, solid.

I take a long handled teaspoon from
the white drawer
and dip out some water.

I stand with it balanced over the sink.
and look at my naked body.
to decide where to put it.

I place my wrist over the sink
and splash the water down.

It feels cool

as it bracelets me

I press the spoon to my skin
but feel nothing.

So I reach for more

The second spoonful

steams from the pot

I turn my hand pulse up

and dash it down.

My breath becomes a soft ha.

That's where I should stop.

Let's Makeup

My face is poised
to run over your lip
at your urging

the red pencil
of your tongue
paints its itch
in lines down my spine

you suck
pink blush sponges
beneath my ear

my eye leaks
to your fist
in indigo
you brush it against my ribs
the colour settles in my hollows
deep red

But I apply the mascara myself
black ink strokes
I write everything on the lines of my lashes
but no one can see

you colour me in

one moment at a time

hands fumbling

through my palate

I'm running out of skin

I'll wait for the sale

exchange my empty flesh

for a new tanned crust

Flipbook

I try to take a picture of you

but you are a

smear

in my eye

that won't come out

I see you, vague

you, blurred

You with your half bottle of sour sav

You with your sleeves rolled up

You with your fear

of being sentimental

with your grey tinted glasses

fingerprinted

with your creased shirt

You with your car park covered salsa

You with your loose eyelash

with your eyes covered as the light flicks on

with your pillow to shut

shut

shut me out.

You with your old tyre

ringed coffee cup

beard falling in the sink

shoulder warm jacket

mouldy bread

second wear socks

your denim off the floor

You with your snapping turtle fingers

with your laughter

You with your pen that fits your hand

writing itself blank

You with your dry garden

your heated home brew

half remembered massage

You with your finger tip

your tongue

drying my face

your egg stuck to the cardboard

pulled up

lost insides

demand for coffee

You with your feral cat

hatred of contracts

you with your hands in my hair

sandy feet

six surfboards

chilly bin

arm around me

beach dancing

fake leather jacket

fake cigarette

fake smile

flowing through your fingers

You with your tears.

You with your hands around my throat.

You with your bitten fingernail.

You.

The stain of you.

I have got to stop loving you

(After Ai)

so I take my landlord's axe
march across the lawn
and swing it at the oak tree
that watches me.

My shoulders shake
and acid sweat pours
into my eyes
as I hack
but when I look up
there is only a small mouth
in the bark
running with screaming
and sap
words I don't hear

Mother always said
don't pick at scabs
you'll make them bleed
and leave a scar

Pisces

There is no empty space
in the bed we shared
because you spent your nights
wrapped around me in a vine
the only hollow is in your shoulder
where my head used to lie.
I would crouch beside you
and listen to you breathe,
counting the gaps between
my chest beats against
itself, a rhythmic sting
as you spin my ribs like blinds
to shield you from the light
your hand, metallic
fits so well between my teeth
but you slipped it out when I was sleeping
in folds around my voice
you stole to put in your tackle box
with the feathers and the oil.
You'll use it to snare
your next Piscean dream.

Missing

I disappear underneath your pencil
the paper dents below
fisted purple and red.

You press with the intent of fingers
digging ditches in my skin
I smudge you
at the limits of myself.

and everything you run your
palm across
in orange is closed.

You shine me in your colour.

When your tears fall
they can't soak in
through the layer of wax
you've smothered over me.

when you left
flakes of you
collected beneath my fingernails.

You colour me outside the lines.

Drip

We walk the bank of the river
to drain the water
that lies between us

we walk because we can't touch
even the outside edges of our
hands
without you laying a sheet of sweat
on me and covering it with your body

but as you ask me about my day
one letter at a time
slips between your lips
and drips into me

I feel it run
down my body
pool in my feet
and it makes it hard
to walk next to you
in the dark
without taking your hand
so we head for the swings

but the gravity
swings the liquid
and the breeze strokes my hair
and when we go to leave
you cloak yourself around me

my head fits just there
and your fingers
cradle my skull
and you drink from it
kissing at my face

we carry each other up the hill
to bed

Webs

Lover,

I've missed you

where have you been?

the words he said

lie heavy in me

solid

I am crusted in mirrors

face to face with myself

frozen

no touching

my mouth aches

for fingertips

soft, insistent lips

and wet wanting

Lover,

sharpen your teeth

suck at me

until my lips

warm

and you can kiss me

so deep

I feel known

pour breath

alcohol warm

into my mouth

until I am drunk on your saliva

booze thinned blood

hot within

but leave my hands trapped

in the ice.

Lover,

my body's heating

but I cannot writhe

I'm caught

in the frozen web

of words I still believe

slide your coping saw

between my legs

rough cut

then turn them on your lathe

snap them free

to wrap around you

massage them

beneath your tongue

turn my blue

to cream and pink

before I can hold you off

with my doubtful arms

let me lie trapped
in my icy bed
at your mercy
and Lover,
be merciless
lick the ice from me
lick me clean
while I can't escape
leave my hands trapped
so I have to let you.

Lover,
your gasping
makes water run
from my ribs
I have room
to breathe vowels
but not your name

reach under the ice

splay your hands on my ribs

I want you

to crush the air from me

so that when you relax

I breathe so deep

I crack the ice over my breasts

myself

warm them

with your mouth ungentle

demand me

and I will rise to you

but leave my hands

held fast

and cold.

Lover,

Lift me from the ice

onto the kitchen table

sweep it clear

with the back of your arm

but Lover,

hold my hands fast

so I can listen to my body

and not his voice.

Hunting

My hands covered you like the dark
stuck fast along the length
of our fingers.

Your feathers fell to one side,
stirred with my breathing.

I felt the map of your wrist
touch mine
lines sinking into each other
like dust into crevices

why can't I look at you?

I followed your folded future hand
along the dunes
dodging gorse, thistles, brown glass shards
I laid myself down
with them and your kisses
as a covering.

Your eyes reflected the moon.

I couldn't touch you
as you filled me with the gush of sky
as if it was shot
and laid its head

beside yours

on my shoulder

But I licked the rain from your face.

I was a shell

buried in your foot

and you needed me there

as we staggered

though water that fell and hissed in the sand.

Why don't you need me now?

As the thunder buries itself in the sky

the rain becomes your hands

but the ground does not move beneath me.

You are gone.

You do not light

the room

with your messages.

You do not call.

You do not spread

a layer of yourself

along the back of the seat

to slide into my hair.

I find flecks of you on my clothing
and in the creases of my mouth
you taste of active yeast
burnt THC
and disappointment

But you are not here.

My body is alone
unpeeled from itself
flapping like a wounded bird.

Shoot me until I am still.

Breathing the memory of you
undoes me like
a shoe
slipped on and off
one time
too many.

Sex is Best When You Want to Kill the Other Person

Sex is best when you want to kill the other person

Tender.

You know how it ends.

You've read this book

before

pages soft and frayed

but the flawed characters compel you

to read again

hoping

someone will change

blow dust from the torn cover

roll off the pink hair tie

holding the pages in

try again.

Sex is best when you're angry

Sparks.

Static shocks off the page

lovers come together, vice

twisted closer

teeth gripped on

they hide in the pages

words inked to cover

their shame
and the gut rock knowledge
of the trial to come
is not enough
to stop reading.

Sex is best when there are only two lovers in the bed

Silence.

no pages screaming past promises
no pages fallen
lying featherless between.

If the book is well bound
the lovers exist only for each other
for the cave under the covers
where they hide

Sex is best when you have a connection

Synergy.

so deep
the colour of the lover's eyes
pour into each other
and they see only the same thing
salted water
so smooth, so thin
it lays on them clear

and they shine
wet teeth
embedded in each other.

But which book are you reading?
Or did you again, fall asleep
with it open
face down
rising and falling on your chest
as you dream,
create the ending yourself?

The lovers are flawed.
Close the cover over their writhing bodies
Pick up the fallen pages
stuff them inside
wrap it in a pink hair tie
put the book
softened with the grease of your fingers
and your breathing
back
until next time
Because you know how it ends
You don't need to read it
again.

Foundation

the rabbits dig in the paddock

looking for a piece of me.

Every morning I take my spade

blunted on cores

of dock and gorse

and try to fill them in

No matter how much dirt

they spread

in their search

there is never enough to fill the hole completely

when you try to tamp it tight

I place the water trough over the biggest hole

and overnight three more appear

and the beginnings of four more

where they've been looking

for the roots of me

I fill the hole with manure

taken from the patch

where it lies with the others

tamp it hard

take the hose and water it in

trying to plant something new

from nothing but mud.

The fence wires sag from the storms

the lawn growing through them

the only apple tree left

standing since they tore the orchard down

is a new cavern

I'm scared if I look

I'll discover this ground

I run on

isn't solid

instead

an intersecting web of

tunnels

they've dug into my weakening

the thing

that lets me stand.

My skin is cold

where you lifted your hands from me.

The Hoax

At the back of the body is a label

that says 'this body belongs to'

There is no name in the gap

I would write my own name

but no matter how I stretch

I cannot reach

The body thought

maybe

it had found someone trusted to write it

for me

folded itself

in front of a mirror

wondering

how it grew a second

pair

of arms

just the size

to wrap

once round the shoulder

once around the waist

to bear the body up

against the struggle

and how they could
lift the body
behind the knees
and carry the body
as if it weighed nothing
from the screaming
from the plastic cups
trampled under feet
of an army of music.

The body looked and looked into the mirror
wondering how it grew a second
pair of eyes
the colour of the lanyard
that held its silver gymnastics medal
when it was twelve
the body trusted him
to write its name
for he knows it
not the name written
on my face
by the narcissist
and bully
but my secret name

he knows it
hides it behind his teeth
which mark the body
where it is seized

but his body is eleven
empty
beer cans
in the foot well
of a car
rolling

his body is seven
used
acupuncture needles

his body is a six letter
space in a crossword
four across
and the clue is
fear

his body is three
paddock covered limes

two cups of coffee

his body is one
shattered
bottle
of cologne
and he is
evaporating

he won't let the body
touch him
for fear
I'll cut my palm on
a shard of himself
or that his scent
might bloom
on my wrists

But the fingers bleed
already
and the skin
smells of his skin
already
where his chest
meets the chest
where his thighs
meet the thighs

where his mouth

where his

mouth

meets the body.

The body is

broken

held together

with saliva

from his silver sliver

of a tongue

with howlite beads

with a slipknot skipped

around its cut logs

but he is afraid

so the body remains nameless

pained

with its breathing

Breaking and Entering

Once, your hands knit the pieces of me together
in threads of spring
to make yourself a covering.

Quick, unpick.

The future is coming.

Once, uninvited, you cut yourself a key to me.

The day in the parking lot you played locksmith,
tongue tip touching the corner of your mouth
one finger behind my teeth
as you manipulated me and my pink dress
away from a silver front bumper.

It was not until the key you left in my lock opened its eyes that
I was afraid.

You threaded your needle with wire
beckoned me closer with the tilt of your eye
and stitched me into your nipple
alongside a ring of polished steel
That I could not reach to pull myself out.

You took my fingers.

One night
when you were kissing my ankles
you imagined a cricket inside of me.

Now I hear it singing
and feel its legs
fiercely kissing each other
violent metal-soaked mouths
not coming up for air
long into the night.

I crawl on the floor of myself
glass in hand to cover it.
but it is vicious
in its leaping.

You're never here.

Now, you walk into my dinner date for one and I go
for a fingerprint on a glass that you take from my hand.

I dream of you, tongue buried behind my ear under a street
lamp
begging me for just a little bit more.

Now, you crouch inside me, thirsty
licking the inside of my skin
with your cat's tongue.

You are my drought.

You follow anything that flows

to scorch it bare.

My wrist fits snug into the curve of my teeth

And your laugh stares back at me

while your hands pick the pieces of me apart

**Kali is Told to Write
Something Beautiful for a
Change**

Menses

You recognise it immediately: the smell of soaking. It's heavy, wet, fecund. The smell of life. It reminds you of your purpose. The purpose of all women. To breed. To bleed. Both preclude the other. Walk the line between them, tinfoil in your hand. You move into a stall and lift your skirt. Your underwear slips to your knees and you perch, breathing the damp. Blood has a flavour that isn't iron. It's seed and mud. It is the breathing mangroves and the placenta steaming in the paddock. It is life. It is death. You cannot escape this as a woman. You die a little every month. Your potential dies, over and over until you breed or dry up. Once you are waterless you avoid public bathrooms and teenage nieces. The smell is something every woman understands. Every woman craves. Every woman curses. It will not let you forget. Not for a moment. Put several women in a house together and they will bleed in sync. Their bodies move together with the moon. Perhaps this is why your friends are fat together while you are frail. Perhaps this is why every summer, pregnant women follow you, taunting. And in the winter, crutches tap and people look at you from behind plaster.

When a man comes to you while you're bleeding, you're open. Feet apart, knees bent, cervix wide. The succubus wants to swallow him whole. There is no restraint. Put down a towel, place him between your legs and cleave to him. He will smear himself with you, paint himself in lies. He will come closer and deeper. He will pour himself into your secret depth. But when he stops twitching, he will be dead too. He will slip from you a thief. He will stare at himself in the mirror, dabbing at his painting until it does not exist. He will wash his face, clean his teeth and pick under each of his nails. He will leave you bloody on the bed. And the scent will rise from you with the salt.

But what happens if all of this happens the first time?

He takes you to a covered wagon. You step back in time. The moon pours through the rip in the canvas. Outside, the sea roars behind the dunes. Inside the candle lights his face. He spends an age kissing you. He tastes you everywhere. He covers you in saliva, which dries in runic patterns. If you swam, it would liquefy, run down your legs to the sand. His tongue is a spell. Your mind wanders along the mattress to the wooden floor. It picks up splinters as it slithers across and out the rip. It picks up sand. The first wave hits it, knocking it back up the beach. The second wave sucks it out until it floats. The waves build and it rocks on them until it is barrelling back up the beach and slamming itself back into your skull. Black spots dance with the candle flame. He says he wants to lick you clean. His tongue is jelly, warm against your skin.

When you wake his tongue is back between your legs. Or did it never leave? Dawn heats the wagon. The canvas hangs heavy with dew. You see drops travelling down it, the words you've chanted slipping back to you. Did you sleep? Is that him, or a burning fiend between your legs, sucking and biting, writing spells? The fiend slides up your body and settles. You are beyond words. He smiles and takes some from your mouth. You taste salt, musk and iron. He bites your lip and you bite him back. You are a puddle of words and spit. Have you ever placed a hand deep inside a cow as she strains? Have you ever pulled a calf by its ankle bones into the light and air? In the final moments, when you take your first breath, the sun streams through the rip. You realise he is bleeding. And he realises it is you.

I think that's how he caught me. He planted something in me, deeper than was safe. It slipped up inside and went so far it caught my bloodstream. It poisoned me. My river ran red and he licked it from me until I was dry. I do not remember being open. I do not remember being wet. I am no longer a marsh. The paddock is burnt to dust and the calves are ash. The mangroves do not breathe. But I remember the smell. And sometimes I half-wake shaking, breathing heavy. I slip my hand over my dune ribs and down my stomach. It runs flat, footprints descending. And my fingers find the sea. This must mean I am not dead. But when my eyes are open, unclouded, the tide runs out and I am left parched. I struggle through the muddy sand, trying to find it. The mud claws me back and I exhaust myself fighting. I cannot ever see the water. I don't know that it's there.

Clusterfuck

If I had a cock I would fuck you right back,
you think yours is for fear?

Mine would scare the balls off a ram.

Maybe then I could jerk off on your face,
force your cunt to take my lies.

My cock wants to fuck you

so you can see how it feels

to be trapped in a room with a match box size window

trying not to exist, in case you hear

Maybe then I could be the arrogant piece of shit

and you could be dead inside.

but I'm not like you

Because my cock would be for pounding things until they are
gasping alive

For reined teasing, warm gulping and lan-guo-rous stroking
pleasure mounting, blood pulsing, head bursting joy.

But I don't have a cock, or a cunt.

I have a softness that you'll never have

For hot licking, cold blowing, light tickling, I am

for filling, and filling and filling and then

for holding so softly in the palm of *his* hand.

A Perfect Circle

One night

earphones vibrating in my ears

trying to cover the squeaks and groans

of my mother fucking a bald man upstairs

(again)

I pluck out all of my pubic hairs

one by one

except for a

5 hair

wide

stripe

in the

middle

with her silver eyebrow tweezers.

Some come up easy and don't hurt

some make a branch scratching window noise

the ones at the back are hard to reach

some bleed like when you squeeze a sponge really, really

slowly

red pearling into view then overflowing

I stick the ones that have white wobbly tips

to the blue concrete block wall

I make a Celtic circle pattern.

Press play again.

I take the pink headed pin

from the wheel I stole from school

and on the left side of the 5 stripe

(that pointed the way)

I etch the triquetra from the wall

into my translucent skin

it's hard to make a perfect circle

but once I have it I press

deeper and deeper into the scratches

I keep engraving until the reek from upstairs stops.

The red digital clock reads 3.17.

I have red fingers to the second knuckle.

I still don't sleep.

Cancelled

The head is the stain
of blood run from my nose
to the sheet beneath

The neck is the whip
that lashes the back
to shreds of paper that blow

the shoulders are the shelves
that hold the knowledge

the breasts are the bags
for the rocks and the fear

the ribs are the chains
that hold me close
so I can wriggle and writhe
but never escape

the stomach is the site of the struggle
where, with your wolf grin
and your red hands
you took me

the hips are the rails
that hold back the crowd

the thighs are the headstones

in the broken graveyard

The knees and ankles

hinges to the door

the lock you broke open

the feet are the paws

of the rabbit

ripped off for luck

but the stomach

is the site

of the struggle

where,

with your wolf teeth

you split me

from my mother

you clamped our cord

clipped me free

and I didn't

breathe

just spread the stain

from the neck

my stomach now
the site of the struggle
so you wrapped me
in blue plastic
and I died
and you smiled
lifted the lid
and threw
me
away

Sensitive Crimes

(a poem found in headlines)

Women should not go out at night

or wear clothes that might be seen as provocative

this will enhance the safety and security of women

prevent

the *sensitive crime*

of being *beaten unconscious*

beaten bloody

was it *sensitive* when he

inserted an iron rod into my body?

when he *did not stop?*

very grave

I switched off the lights

police refuse to accept complaints

because the movie finished in the dark.

I was *bound with ropes and chains*

he helped pass out fliers

after *knocking out* my teeth

he *comforted* my mother.

He used a *sick game* to train me

so I would not run

I *kicked through* a screen door

But in my *euphoria*

I question my *suspicious activity*

This guy is sick

intending to steal

he drank

stumbled

to join a gang

He *broke into* a five year old

My mother *screamed*

there was *a man inside lying on top of her daughter*

overwhelmed

he *grabbed me around the neck*

beat me about the face and body

I just disappeared

he could remember nothing

Everything *will depend on whether she tells someone else*

I walk from the library

after dark

with my hair down

in a skirt

of terror

Reoccurrences

I am at the bottom of
the brightest well
I am the thing you feel
with your
foot, soft,
soft
when no one is looking
everything is white stone
lines show where the tide comes to
well over my head
I hear the sea breathing beyond the wall
it is coming
I cannot touch
or I will burn
I rat run
round the walls
wake up sliding on the wooden floor
where the carpet used to be
was dreaming
am dreaming
waking sleep

Headmistress sits in the bath
water would reach my mother's navel
my brain photo-shops her
so I see the creases and paps swinging
but no nipples

I beg "is there something in this house"
her bat face stares through me
grinning
she flaps around my head
like wind beaten hair

there's no one there

a friend and I
take both cordless phones
there is a trap door in the basement
I am given a lamb to carry
it sleeps in my arms
children go down the ladder
and don't come up

we are outside

a truck pulls up

full of calves

I hear them cry for my mother

but won't share

I taste the dust from the driveway

when he steps from the cab

his face tells me he will make a pie of us both

he goes looking for his axe

to paint the mirror

with small yellow tendrils

I'm a Woman Now

I stand under florescent lights
that shatter over my skin
make me off white
the doctor hums at his clipboard
staring at me over the top of his glasses

No he says to the nurse
that won't do
and begins to draw a map on me in black sharpie

the map is the route of removal:
marks me where I am wrong

he starts with my breasts
swelling full and pink tipped
I remember him sucking them
and he takes his scalpel
and cuts them off

slowly at first
so slowly
that my skin opens for him
spreading to show my soft pink insides
hoping it will be different.

My left breast slaps into the silver pail
splattering his pants.

The doctor smiles

I shrink from him
as knowledge drips from
my breast socket
trickling red over my ribs
but the nurse holds me
for my own good

He begins on the second breast
and I scream, thrashing
but the woman
wrestles me to the ground
places an androgynous foot on my throat

my second breast hits the bucket
sets it ringing
sorrow
and the doctor stands tall
behind his mask

He tears my uterus from me
ovaries chiming bells
and sends it to the pail

he kneels beside me
as if praying
begins to sew
soft lips between my legs
shut tight

he fills my curves with collagen
cuts my hair to my chin
he cracks my feet
between his palms
the bones break through the skin

I cannot dance, I have no hips

my feet will not hold me

the doctor takes a spray bottle

shades my wounds yellow

with iodine

only when I'm half a man

am I acceptable to him

he hands me an oversized jersey

and combat boots

and tells me I'm a woman

now.

Tinnitus

Slap me again

the split lip makes my mouth even bigger

and the blood helps the words stick

go on

slap me

feel like the big man

If you had control of me

you wouldn't need your fist

slap me

help me scream

so the ringing in your ears

reminds you of the woman

you couldn't beat down

and everything red

makes you taste my iron

Slap me fucker

slap me hard

make my teeth close together through my tongue

and know that even then it will

foam with the words

you want

buried

your fist knew it

wrote it on my temple

see here in blue?

Fuck you

Uprising

when you grab at me I will take your hand between my fingers

and bend it until it clicks

you'll cry a little now

which I'll like

I'll do it harder to feel your knuckles pop apart in my hand

they look odd in the light that bleeds through the leaves

you will fall to your knees and I will release my foot to slide

you in jerks across the pavement

your ribs sigh and split

my foot will catch you between the legs as you writhe

it's nice to watch the slow motion wriggle of your dignity

across the concrete

you stain it plum

you beg me now

it's cute

I like it

I like the way the blood makes your mouth redder and wider

like the lipstick you forced onto me

like the teeth marks you left on my breast

it makes me want to cut you more mouths to beg me from

so I do

no precision

just gaping slashes begging me to stop

begging me for more

you want me now baby

that's how we got here

you want to fuck me now

I bet you do

I bet the blood hanging from my fingers makes you hard

I can fix that for you

relieve your tension

it's what you wanted

you wanted violence

you wanted me hogtied on the dew of this car park crying

yes baby

yes

don't stop

I won't stop now darling

I'll ride you hard like you wanted

not quite like you wanted

and you'll sag against me like a lover

energy running from you

and the red lips I've carved on your neck

predator

hunter

jock

I said nothing

My mother said

Feeling a bit sad isn't the same as being suicidal

this attention seeking scratching

has to stop

do I need to lock you away

because cutting is worse than crazy

it's pathetic

if you really wanted to hurt yourself

you'd do it properly

I mean it

go home

and take all of those pills

since living

is obviously not what you want to do

the best thing for everyone

would be if you weren't here

or you weren't you

maybe if you altered yourself

you would have more friends

your father would be interested in knowing you

then again

who needs another disappointment

My boyfriend said
what are you trying to do
you never stick at anything
no commitment
fucking useless
may as well give up now
you got pregnant on purpose didn't you?
well you can't trap me
I'm not staying in this train wreck
you'd have to be crazy to want
to touch you
it's a good thing you lost it
your body
obviously knows
you are not fit
to take care of it
You are so dirty
slut
The idea of touching you
makes me sick
I don't love you
never did
will never
could never love

a girl like you
I mean how could anyone love
a girl whose own father
couldn't
why should I bother
when you're obviously
not worth it
fucking you could leave a lifetime reminder
who would make that kind of commitment
there's only one thing a girl like you is good for
I'm telling you
it's not marriage
so lie the fuck down

In which people try to protect Kali from a 'bad' man

They think I'm not

'that kind of girl'

they think

my heart's

split for eating

like a peach

until I am a stone

but

I am Kali

naked

with dishevelled hair

I ride you

the falcon of fear

indifferent to your wellbeing

I am the hero of this story

and I don't need rescuing

I am Kali

flushed

drunk on the blood

lapped from my legs

I fizz with incarnations
of what you might be

I have ten heads
ten arms
ten legs
that kind of woman
the one you call
spectacular

lift me in your arms
tell me I am
words
falling from your lips
to paint the page

Who are you?
burnt breeze,
ruffling the feathers
of so many mother hens
you touch me like you own me

I like it
because you know
I will not scream
facedown on the lawn

arms stretched to breaking
chlorine freezing on my skin
again

any violence
will be mine to rouse
and mine to douse
with a word

I don't need to tell you
You run from the back of the room
to sit at my feet as I dance

I am Kali
I'll scratch my anger until you yelp
pop you
like a bottle of champagne
pour you
down my body until you're warm
until you breathe
your last bubbling breath

I'll smash the bottle on the driveway
to slice my feet so
the blood and the wine
will soak into the earth

and into the feet
that will walk away
because I am Kali
I am rage
I am the touched
four years without touching
No longer denied
the earthly pleasure
he took from me
with a hickey and a sore
I am Kali
consort to the dead
I am the broken
ready to do some breaking
standing with my foot
on the chest of you, lover
you smile
bite it
rise through me
like the bubbles of the sea

Kali is told to write something beautiful for a change

They built me wrong
not enough glue
under all this acrylic
holding me back
they painted me breasts
and no mouth

So all I'm good for
is soapy hands
spread legs
and sweet nothing poems
about flowers

So.

Sweet flowers breeze bobbing
nodding
Freesias rotting
over the corpses
of all the lambs
spilt from the womb

no

I'm wrong

Try poems about kittens

fluffy, hugged kittens

skipping

hung from their collars

by wire beneath the sofa

paws

unscrambling

no

I'm wrong

Try poems about shoes

bedazzled stilettos

carrying hookers

to shining pieces

in the boots of cars

no I'm wrong

Always so wrong

They shouldn't have painted me eyes

I've seen too much

imagery ripping me

a set of teeth

with which to

threaten

all the boys with painted lips

I've said too much

with this red tongue

licking all the things

a lady shouldn't

Next time

forget the glue

just make me a door

for you

to walk right through

Kali Looks at Facebook Photos of Her Friend's New Baby

One month on
the worm has no name
they call her baby
tiny perfect fingernails
carve into her tiny
perfect face
Kali licks her finger
covers it
imagines it clicking
against the rest
around her
long
red
neck
They should call her Kali
akachan
the red one
wrap her in a red dress
full of pins
to draw up her
white
pudgy

arm

she'll like it sharp

and bloody

baby lives in a letter

sealed with spit

pink booties remove her hands

slap her bottom

smooth as a dog's headstone

pink

strain her through muslin

pink

double dose of baby ibuprofen

down for the night

pink

cosmopolitan for Kali

baby smiles

spits at you

farts on your arm

You never sleep

Your breasts

empty and cracked

learn to peel apples in one

spinning

swathe

of skin

for eating

and Kali lights her durrie

toasts the bags under your eyes

here's to your success

Bruce watches Kali dancing

(After *Lady Lazarus*)

Smart girls don't strip.

Slutty ones do.

You perch on the stool

your drink drools

on the table

licks your hand

when you pour it down

your hollow throat

The MC said

when the sluts do something

you like, let them know

You're surprised how many

bitches are here

howling at the moon

shaped ass

on stage

baying at the

glove that peels off

like skin.

empty hands don't interest you.

you wait for something
from your
walking, talking textbooks
your reference porn.
Burlesque means strippers
you don't need to tip
bitches where they belong
naked, onstage
submissive

I breathe behind the curtain
see you
knees split
wide as they'll go
as if the burden of your balls
fills the space with their blueness

I know you're waiting for me
because I'm young
I'm skinny
my mouth is red like a sign
and a sigh
it will not smile.

I know you expect
the girl you grope in the bar

eyes wide

hissing tacks

falling to the floor

but I also know

there is nothing between your legs

worth having.

I slide my mask,

my wig on

the music starts

At first, I'll let you think you've won

I ripple

your cheers a stone

that breaks my surface

take the fingers of my glove in my teeth

pull it off

stroke it like a cock

so you know what I'm for

flick it to a puddle

on the floor

I read the word

you marked black

on my skin

dirty

The second glove

used

sticky condom

rolls off

slut

The crowd cheers

You think

you made me.

The more clothing that falls

the more words appear

black

etched on my skin

nasty

bitch

skank

tight ass

cunt

when the song finishes

I fall to the floor

and your cheers.

I let down my hair.

my red air

flames

I rise, call it to me

leaving you winded.

The women in the crowd scream.

You look up at the thing

you thought was under your foot

for good.

The words begin to fall

leaving my skin silver

you close your mouth

you close your legs

I am red

I open mine wide

teeth red

from biting my tongue

cunt red

bleeding clean

smart girls don't strip

sarcastic ones do

Kali goes to Christmas Dinner

Kali leaves her kitchen

behind

wet newspaper

becomes a kitten

scrabbling on the road

eyes shine

from coke cans

she drives into the rain

and the pain uncurls

behind her eyes

Her uterus is up for discussion

frayed female

flatmate wanted

the orange spanking spoon

left in the pan

burns

can't handle the heat

bin it

clamp

cut the cord

Exactly what sort of job

will you do

after all this university study?
strawberry tops
fall
like snow
to cover the tissues in the bin
and how much will you make?

The turkey reminds Kali
she needs new moisturiser
none for Christmas
just a pink lipstick
lotus flower candle holder
'Grow Your Own Boyfriend'
just add water.
scaled legs
wrap around her chest
squeeze

Kali clicks herself on the table
Isis and Demeter pull crackers
for foetuses and paper hats
Her mother gifts Kali
a 6 litre slow cooker
and a 5 piece platter set
in blue and yellow

to feed her unborn children
her unwed man
as Kali's Master's degree is for
husband hunting
but no crossbow
for Christmas

Her mother preaches the Christmas sermon:

Kali will never know love
she needs a husband
to look after her bills
equality comes later
wiping a man's ass
when he is old
repays
the financial debt
of a swollen belly

She does not notice
men's cheating hands
cut, spread over Kali's waist
their lie spun heads
hung from her ears

She does not see

Kali's lover kneel

beg her to put her feet on him

that he might kiss them

so he can sleep

Merry mother fucking Christmas.

Things Don't go to Plan a.k.a Kali has Sex with her Ex-boyfriend

I stare up at the blue towel bath mat

hung from the white rail above the shower

and the one long strand of hair hanging

by its tip.

it moves as I breathe

rain strokes the window pane

as I wonder

whose hair it is

It's been a month since you sent me from your bed

so it can't be mine

then again, I am insidious

and I do not take no for an answer

we lie together

on the bed

and listen to the storm

kill itself on the roof.

We're wrapped in protective layers

careful not to touch each other

the ways we know how

touching

platonic pieces of skin

to keep warm.

Liquid seeps

through the ceiling

and falls into the blue bowl

you've placed by the window.

but

I am Kali

and you, Shiva

will consort

and contort

with me

or we'll both drown

we inch together

one fingertip at a time

until I'm pulling on your nipple ring

and you're biting my neck

and then someone tugs a zip

and then

you're skinnier than I remember

but just as warm

and then you kiss me

like I am the last mouth
taking handfuls of skin
from my ribs
and my throat and hips
and holding on
places
I used to have flesh
and I'm trying to climb inside your skin
where I can smell you
and then.

You bury your head in my chest
and say we shouldn't
because you are an honourable man

I hear a drop hit the bowl.

You forget

Shiva,

you are a corpse without me,

Shiva you may be fire

but I am the power to burn

without me you are orange air

and ash

Do not forget
that I am the Mother of all language
I am the way things are
I am time and change
and rebirth
I am armed with a sword and noose
and a skull topped staff
I will write you
until you're bloody
and you beg for more
I know where you live
I've tasted it.

I offer to give you
an itemised list
of logical reasons
why we should fuck
you press yourself against me
and I feel your pulse there
head, throat, belly and balls
beating against me
the groan
that admits you need me echoes

through my larynx
into my spine

you wrap your arm around my waist
and squeeze like I'm dying
and you don't even notice the lengths

I went to
so this wouldn't happen
as you're tearing off
my oldest, flesh coloured
'I-will-not-fuck-you'
underwear
with my track pants
like they're burning.

I remember
this wasn't part of the plan
as they sail overhead
and you brand my vulva with your mouth
and I don't care
because this is the way things are.

I am awareness and bliss
I am matted hair
bloodshot eyes
wide open

tongue seeking blood
I am Kali
consort to the dead.

you unpick my roots from the earth
one by one
with your fingers
and your teeth
as though defleshing
a drumstick and I have never been anywhere
but this bed
and your mouth says nothing
and everything
against my skin
and the only things that will be blue
at the end of this night
are your eyes
and mine
and the sky
if it ever stops raining

I collect the pieces of you like shells
and place them in my mouth
to tongue with thought
like an aching tooth

once I leave:
your eyelid
your earlobe
your throat
the tendon bristling
from your shoulder blade
as you grip me
your thumb
my thumb
your lips
and tongue
and I am Kali
and your arm
and your Kali
and yours

And then we are chasing each other
footprints filling with water
as the rain streaks down our faces
your hands wrapped in my hands wrapped in my hair
flaming
reaching for your beard
and you kiss my third eye
and you press your head against mine

and spill

the things you won't say to me
into my keeping.

You lie where you belong, Shiva
beneath my feet, enchanted.

I will not give what is expected
or apologise
for taking advantage of you
while you're drunk

I wrap my skirt of wrists
around my hips
and step through the door
to steam
in the rain

Don't forget what it is
you brought to your bed.

Kali gets a Snapchat Dick Pic

I like to fuck.

Last night I spent
two hours wrapped around
my favourite cock:
sub-conscious
screaming
and drunk.

I love
the smooth curve upward
fat steel ring that tightens
when it throbs
and a pearl of cum just for me.
I'm no stranger to this phallus
slim, curved in just the right place
and wielded with accuracy
over and over.

It does not fuck me
when I'm in the mood

I fuck it.

Hard.

And if it arrives in my inbox
cradled in the hands I love
I know it leads to the arms of my lover
that can press and hold
the pierced tongue
that knows my skin so well
and the generous man
who would rather
I come than he did.

I get wet because
it belongs to a man
who loves my brain
and my cunt
in that order.

But in my time
I've licked wrist-like thick dicks
that don't try hard enough
and growers
and showers
because dicks are everywhere
and anyone who has one in his pants
wants to share so bad

he'll lie 'I love you'
hold you if you cry

I walked past a Korean girl
engaged in vigorous fellatio
with an ice block

She must have rubbed her tongue raw
lemonade burn
and didn't seem to realise
how her male friends
watched
and watched.

I met a nice boy once.
He told me about how
his mother makes him roast chicken
on a Thursday
because it's his favourite
and then he sent me
a picture of his penis
hard in his hand
held up against
the biggest bic lighter
I have ever seen.

His cock
was eclipsed
by an ego
so large
the lights dimmed
as he imagined
all the girls
panting for him
while his computer
sucked the last
ohm from the wall
with muffled moaning
and his sock sucked
his trickle of splodge

You forget yourself, dick pic douche bag,
Your uninvited,
disembodied cock
is so pitiful
it belongs in a Shakespearian
tragedy
(preferably the one
where everyone dies at the end)

I'm not just these tits
this flaming hair
and the ass you want me to give up
so bad it haunts you
I'm this clit I'm sure you'll never find
as my brain would blind you

Gentlemen,
boys,
douche-copter dudes:
a cock without context
makes
the septuagenarian creepo
in the long grey jacket
who flops it out
at school girls
in the morning
look friendly.

You poor misguided
whelp of a child
your pride could hold a parade
that no one would attend
Remove a rib
go suck yourself

and don't bother any woman with
your shrinking phallus
until you learn
it's not the cock that makes the man
it's how he uses it.

Broken Villanelle

Break me open in your bed

choose the pieces you will keep

Split your knuckle, paint me red

Write the words you leave unsaid

I will hold you while you sleep

Break me open in your bed

Bits of lonely, hot drip fed

Put your wall up, I will seep

Split your knuckle, paint me red

Dance and I will say you led

Through this wreckage, we can creep

Break me open in your bed

Of all the nights that I have bled

This one makes me writhe and leap

Split your knuckle, paint me red

Who am I now that you are dead?

you stole me, now you're buried deep

Break me open in your bed

Split your knuckle, paint me red

Journeys Back

She wakes with a foot on her chest. It's heavy. She's cold. She has overheated in her sleep on the chest of a man, pushed the covers away. The sweat has dried on her shoulders, left her salt, sticky and shaking. She peels herself from him and he rolls towards her, lips in her hair. He murmurs, kisses her shoulder and subsides back into dreaming. The corner of his mouth slides upward and he tightens his hold on her. She wants to smile back at him. Her eyes hit the ceiling instead.

The thing about being belted is that in the moment, you enjoy it. In bed, wrists caught up in one muscled hand, spread up the pillows, wanting. She watches the hand rear back, knows it's coming. Tense, waiting— for a split second that takes forever, unable to move, not wanting to. The sound of it hits worse than the hand. Open palm, it connects with her ribs and the edge of her breast. It doesn't hurt. It feels good. She tells herself it feels good. She tells herself. She feels powerful. She yields to the power in the slap. She likes it. It matches the pull in her chest. It doesn't hurt. It feels good like having a hand slide up your neck to pull you further into a mouth. It feels good, in the moment. It's power. It's men. It's surrender. She wants to scratch him back. She wants to pull him deeper.

But she becomes a lake, and the ripples of the thrown stone calm. She gets compliant. It's not like the last time, and she knows it. She likes the ripples. The body wants waves. The body wants to be a sea for him to stir. She sets the record spinning in her brain, places the needle for it to scream 'it's different!' But her mind takes a step behind the music. It tilts its head, snaps its gloves on, assessing. It takes up its scalpel. It cuts her an escape route, over the bed, out the sliding door. The body wants to tell him to hit her again. The mind wants to scream 'don't hit me!' She says "Play nice." Her voice is small, in a pinafore.

And he does play nice. It *is* different now. He paints kisses on her eyelids. He circles her with the tips of his fingers. He worships her with his mouth. He starts at her toes, moving northwards, and sucks her skin to singing. He breathes shining words on her ribcage. The body wants him to sink his hands into her skin. She wants to handle everything. She can't handle anything.

And the mind still holds the scalpel in the corner, and the body misses violence. The mind wants the hand to slide back into its pocket. The body wants the hand to take it by the throat, push it against the wall with its knees and paint it with bruises.

No one gets what they want.