

I Imagine You

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barefoot in the street with
your next door neighbor,
drinking soda out of bags,
eating with your hands,
letting a stray dog follow you
all the way back to your house.

You say goodbye,
before you're tied to a tree,
before your tongue is beat out of you,
not even for speaking, but
for swallowing—

I know you dread waking up,
washing your face with cold water
from a bucket while your mother
prays in the kitchen.
Your sister kills herself and
we are all ashamed
(or told to be).

When you were younger,
did you ever indulge
in painted nails, silk pillow cases,
cuffing your shorts
that you cut yourself?

I would tell you I did the same thing,
except mine were too ugly to wear.
If we wore the same outfit,
would we be twins? With hair cut below
the nape of neck, curls bouncing as we run
from corner to corner in the market,
stealing small goods from vendors
who wouldn't miss it.

The anticipation of leaving!
I never want to be where I am.
Did you feel the same,
contained in your shack,
your loveless bed that
felt the ground beneath it?
Did you too want to
escape in the lamplight,
travel through the empty streets
until you found someone to
lionize, idolize, emanate?

I desire to free your skin,
leave it to shrink behind you
in your shape, your throat wants
to crawl out of your body,
your chest wants to flatten,
as does your stomach, like a
soda can in the middle of the road.
It wants nothing to do with you anymore.
I can see where you're at, what about me?
Can you see me, in the marsh,
with my shoes wet and muddy?
I take them off—
to be like you.

Sunburns and Wine Popsicles

It takes weeks of sunlight to warm a pool
so for now we sit in freezing water,
waiting for atonement, absorption,
for the vent of disease to open itself again,
for the mouth of scarcity to hunger once more.
To be knee deep in chlorine and daylight
at noon on a Sunday:
a masterpiece of tranquility,
lurid green trees, sky framed by emptiness,
to translate sun into the bloodstream.
Almost like a cat silhouetted in the window,
unaware of the crashed car in my bedroom
crowded by rose bushes,
or the animal bones I found
rotting in a plastic bag by the park bench.

I was looking for comfort,
a hug perhaps, a warm mug
of coffee prepared by someone
who knows how much sugar to add.
There's a moment after swimming
when anything consumed returns
the body to adolescence, when we
used to dream to sleep in swamp water,
lungs infected with watermelon rinds
& the expanse of the dead sea.

Your umber eyes in the light resemble
Orpheus & the moment he went frantic
& left his thumbprints all over the cave,
fingers pricked by ash from hellfire,
blood thick as blackberries dripping down
the length of his arm. Take a minute to glance
everywhere & see that we never made it out,
we are still mucking through fields of clay
and sand. Every morning: stampedes,
strawberry muffins, bawling, the repositioning
of an angel's wings. I seek out warmth
in a place flooded with dirty rain.

On Discovery & Neglect

There's a car in the neighbor's driveway
that never leaves. Decrepit, diseased plastic
that shrinks with age. Everyone that gets into
the car never makes it out; this is where
the road fades into quicksand, where we all
claw for something, anything to hold to.

In dark moments, we cling: steadfast, sustainable,
runner's restlessness, dancing in sunlight grass,
squeezing lime juice in bowls & brothers building
in the backyard. Only those who have stood on one
of the many moons of Neptune know what it means
to sink.

Poor Triton, captured, raging, spiraling.
To be consumed by who you revolve around,
move in retrograde, be the coldest body in the
solar system. There are too many moons to remember.
I discover you and then forget you. The car decays,
the moon shrivels, and there is always more to discover.

You can always be rechristened. I give you
the name of a God then forget about you,
my Pluto, my Underworld. You're lucky to be
named something without numbers. Here I am
raining glass sideways, collapsing in on myself.
I'm so dense & gaseous you would sink into me.

To be named is to be inconsolable,
to have arms made of sand & mosquitoes
that disintegrate when touched. Manipulation
is not always bad; we can sculpt a city from the
castle left untouched by the ocean. Boats make me queasy,
sharks decompose every time they are looked at &
every embrace is unfinished. Vices remain buried underwater
with the crabs, the fish, the bottom feeders.

Uncertainties in Nighttime

Reading O'Hara by the lamplight
because to do anything else
would be to give in to madness,
what can I say that he cannot?

I am tired of
your loveless waning,
your withering affections,
the push and pull of
receding rain.

I sit in a cafe of travelers,
roaming from checkpoint
to checkpoint, dusting crumbs
from their mouths,
stray mugs cups left
on lonesome tables.

A cup of coffee in my hands,
even though it's June,
even though it's midnight,
just for the cultivation of warmth
enclosed in stiff palms.

My muscles cramp from
constraining myself to fit
into this flimsy strain of body,
Clasp your name to my chest
in search of comfort,
leading us both down a promenade,
not opposite of each other,
but slightly behind one another,
unable to inch forward without
the other one mirroring.

Let me be your hands, your verb,
your first sip of iced tea in
the hip of summer.

Is it not enough to want
everything in its entirety?

Stir Crazy

I am uncomfortable with
what we consider trophies
in purgatory: bathtub, piss,
a chunk of hair from an old lover
that is wrapped like a pearl necklace
around the throat, tight and scar-like.

Dreadful the way we dessicate in this pit,
this backyard pool where the water tastes
more like sea salt than chlorine.
Perpetual summer, days are unending.
We are restless, but we rot inside,
boundaries preventing the slightest touch
of wrist to wrist.

Palm to fleeting palm,
feeling each groove of a fingerprint
fill with static and spill over onto concrete.
I don't think we've ever cleaned this pool
and I don't know if we plan to.
Incredible! The lengths we go to for just
a little bit of contact! Bee stings, ball lightning,
lachrymatory, getting change at the register,
lighting someone else's smoke.

I didn't know what to do with the
animal bones you left me,
I buried them behind your Acacia tree,
along with the expired coffee beans
we tried grinding ourselves with
swift hits from your favorite mug.

There's a world in this terrarium
we are inhabiting. I made friends with
worms the size of salt. If I cannot escape,
I hope to bury in the dirt alongside them.

Absolutes

Silver draped around my neck and fingers;
gold is only for the gods. Gold is for those
who aren't tender, who don't caress the back
of the head to pepper a face with kisses.
Maybe I should become catholic again, Ave Maria,
gracias por su seguridad, parece como un abrazo.
We may not be religious but it doesn't hurt
to have someone
watching over us, right?
To have Lady Fatima
around my neck, under my shirt,
against my heartbeat,
warm, offering a hand,
a steadying, a way to catch
all those that are falling into
a world only accessible to the half dead,
all encompassing, full body submersion,
hands running through my curls tether
me between both realms of being.
Without the comfort of another,
what saves us from erasure, from alteration?
There's nothing like being allowed to take
the last of someone's drink but maybe
wearing a lover's ring comes close, or
even the moment when condensation
ruins fresh ink, a smear sinking
into the warm trough of skin.

Semantics

For me this is what we call prickly pear,
tuna, cactus fruit, this is what we call
semantics, a way for you to assert power &
weigh down your side of the seesaw with rocks,
with sand, with loose feathers. Let's not argue
over languages.

English means nothing to us,
just a way out of our bodies. This can be
done with anything: listing,
cutting your hair, setting the house on fire.
I think of my desire to speak every language
on Earth & must come to terms with failure.

English means we can speak to each other
in complete sentences, follow commands,
breathe near each other. Allow me to
think in a way you can't begin to understand.
Gravity, the law of attraction, a kiss under the moon.
A crownless king amidst the unroyal,
fireflies among the rotten fruit in the garden.

Here, convergence is required, expected,
if balance is wanted, if we cared for
a stable plane of existence,
a way to live without worry of
misunderstandings.

Gender Euphoria

The barber in the mirror
cuts the rest of my hair,
strands falling to the floor.
Samson enters the picture
with his lion coat around his shoulders
tufts of hair peeling from his scalp
chemical burn from the want to shed,
his too-big hands stained
from clawing at absence,
as if he can stop both of us
from losing.
I'm sorry it had to be this way,
that you had to curl
like a lone wolf in the corner of the cage
and feel your loss anew
in order to be reborn.
Nothing I say will ever be understood
in the way I mean it so
I will let you croon like a cowboy
if you let me wear your jacket, if only for a moment.
We can pause in this midnight afternoon
and let the moon sit in her stillness
while we thread fallen hair into braids.
I can be the woman who causes downfalls,
who makes men shrivel like snakes and
temples crumble to rubble.
Hubris is hubris,
but for us, Samson,
we must learn not to grow
so comfortable in a skin
that never stops shedding.

Corporeal Inhabitation

Erupting mid-sentence,
earth-quaking my body to bits
letting the moon and the tide
conspire for the apocalypse,
the rapture, the moment the ground opens

beneath our feet and leaves us
breathless, swallowed,
on the other end of a sinkhole,
on the receiving end of prayers,
what it feels like to carry

the shoulders of everyone who asks
for respite, relief, termination,
we are all in an ant-hill waiting
for the molten aluminum, the heavy boot,
the swatting of hands. The beasts

are never left alone for long.
How terrifying to be
the angel, the villain, the one most hated.
Shapeshift into yellow and red snake
with slits for eyes, big-legged spider
with flies in hand,

Charon, the soul trader. There is always
the one who remains on the edge
of temptation: sits in the hollowed
tree and lets the world
and its symptoms subside.

To be in control of a body
is an unwanted thing,
excuses exist for the uncomfortable,
the untamed.

Avoidance

It's so easy to disconnect from the self:
floating figure, ghost with no bones,
warm coffee in July.
Summer sticky thighs &
sweet strawberries, but still,
nicotine breath, how awful,
how self-destructive.
I haunt a windowless house
and can throw back fear
like sugar water.

Objective correlative is me asking for
aspirin, opium, another shot—
it's me asking to fit into a man-sized
absence and still being too big
to squeeze through.
I'm told I'm effortless, but believe me,
I try. I try so hard I erode.

I have wanted
to disappear for days.
I am not myself: chopped hair
in the bathroom, new jacket
around my hunched shoulders,
a name at the corner
of my lips.

A pirate travels around the ocean,
wanting somewhere to dock his ship &
I cannot stop touching my face;
it's the only place my hands can
ground themselves.
I've borrowed your anchor, your anger
from time to time, your
gleaming teeth, pure titanium, coastal salt.
I fall in love listening to you on the radio,
each speaking unaware of the other.
What do we need to discuss now?
What shared absence do we have,
what cages us so tightly our skin

grows around it?
Am I able to contain multitudes?
I breathe in only one direction.
I inherit the world's grief and
pass her to the Moon, poor soul,
I gave her craters.

I know how to
elaborate, carry on when asked,
make grand gestures, concede.
My head's in the clouds lately,
not yet a melon ripe enough for picking,
slice after slice until famine.
There's nothing left here to worship.

Stages of Grief

After weeks of silence, your mom calls
to give me the news of your own desecration.
Your bedroom is the site of natural disaster,
traces of you everywhere like glitter,
like the lingering of smoke on your haphazardly
tossed clothes. In this vision, I was the first
your mother rang. I was supposed to have
the answer for her misery, her infestation of guilt.

I could be the scissors of every cut string,
of every dangling noose. The match to every
inflamed bridge. I save and move on. Every
night we dabble with temptation, condemnation.
Legs entwined on the couch, hiding behind inebriation,
should I be uneasy with where my hands are placed?
Do we do like every night, presume and apologize later?

Dogwood blooming helps no one.
Not when you lay in a coffin, metallic,
gored, collapsed in a cathedral. Elbow out, trying
to combat the bodies of every grieving thing
on Earth. Yes, this includes winter, with
the shells of life she collects as medals.

Your mom, embarrassed by adolescence
ages you up each time she recounts
one of your childhood stories.
The thatch of this home is heavy
with sensations, with stars emptying
their gazes onto fresh brother-in-laws,
cousins with no memory of you
hunched on your back, acting
as their helicopter.

Your mother, the librarian of your life,
collects late fees with every week
you remain underground. Like a
blizzard, she conceals as she ruptures.
We grew sentimental, unable to reign
her in so she could rest. Like you,

we spend every moment waiting
for permanent suspension.

Supernova

Stop staring,
eyes on the bus, on sidewalk,
perceive & leave me
on unsealed concrete.
I am so sick I might contaminate
anyone that looks at me.
Illness secreting from fingertips
like a string of veins.
I spread like germs.
Cities were burning,
cobblestone was cracking,
I was explosive,
bringing the sun to its knees.

The escaped bird has been caged,
the claw marks have faded from skin,
but teeth imprints remain.
Warm me with your breath,
cocoon like baby, depression cave,
sensory deprivation tank, sleep well.

Swallow sleep to avoid calories,
stomach gnawing, I will not lose my hair for you.
I remain the lion, even at the beach,
in the jungle, in the backyard of the zoo.
Do you hunger the way I do?
For the half-eaten bones,
the scraps, the lingering at the crossroads,
I don't know where anything is—but I itch—
I ache.

Coffee, cigarettes, alcohol, repeat.
I try not to scare, no need for concern, only glimpsing.
I would like to sit in the Sun for hours,
absorbing rays, translucent beams glow
like moonwater, like strawberry milk.
The hubris to try to make your own creation.
I dream of you in my bed,
like a mirage, a light in the darkened bedroom.
I grasp, but my fingers hit sand, the home base for dreams.

I can't let you read this, hand in between the thighs,
bit lip, wrinkled forehead.

We have no room for expansion.

I am as concise as can be,
skin taut and clipped of excess,
what am I understating here?

I am a virus. Fire. Mars.

I'm a product of War.

I am a subject no one remembers in the future.

Please let my shape exist out of the parameters.

Mildew

Restless generation, infernal beings
who grip snakes, fearless, living
as gentle as earthquakes. I'm aligned
with those I bear no resemblance.

I'm the twin of Janus, one of four faces,
four phases, less than the moon for sure.
With every heave, gasps for vitality,
each plunge into the ocean becomes less deadly.

I memorized each slight body movement,
body language. When you become
unfathomable and uncertain,
I can decipher the text
as a native speaker,
translate holiness into mundanity.

Everyone has been quiet today.
I wonder if others can see my shadow
from the balcony, stark and imposing.
I become so useless once someone
else is watching. To be obedient,

muscles made literal once again.
Angels squint with their many eyes,
desperate to be passenger to someone
else's journey. How frequently they circle
over warmed figures, how crucial it is to finish
with leftover motivation. I can't imagine
not brimming with urgency, capitalizing off
of a mood, describing the ambiguous,
all while my mouth still lingers
on the taste of mint.