

The Skinny Dip Club

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Craft Essay	iv
The Skinny Dip Club	1
Mona Lisa on the Run.....	3
I Want to Smash the Uterus to a Bloody Pulp.....	8
At the Hour of Our Damnation	26
Witness Me	35
To Become What I Always Was.....	43

Craft Essay

This body of work is a collection of poetry that explores themes of femininity relating to the physical body including traumas of the flesh, family and inheritance, and contemplations on time, memory, death, and dying. The work focuses on the intersection points between female biology generally and the ways in which the female body and constructions of the feminine show up in relationship with self, perception of self, and personal relationships, especially among female family members.

The work is conducted almost exclusively using formal poetic structures, primarily the sonnet. That is a deliberate choice in which the poetic constraints serve to mirror the experience of existing in the female form and the way that can alternately feel confining and liberating. There are fewer instances of poems in free verse, villanelle, and attempts at the old oral-based Celtic form, Rionnard Tri-nard.

State of scholarship

The 21st Century has seen a resurgence in the use of poetic form, especially among poets of color and those from diverse backgrounds. Particularly influential within this surge of the use of form are works such as Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2007; Tyehimba Jess's *Olio*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2017; and Jericho Brown's *The Tradition*, which was a National Book Award Finalist in 2019. These works have taken on formal elements in both the traditional and in new, experimental ways that serve not only to give new life to classic poetic structures, but simultaneously to subvert and expand those forms for writers and audiences alike.

Even more recently *frank: sonnets*, by Diane Seuss won the Pulitzer Prize in 2022. In this collection of Sonnets, Seuss expands the sonnet form — sometimes literally, with lines so

long they require fold-out pages. Throughout the book, Seuss uses frank, mostly non-metered language to explore a range of topics and emotions in her own life, that often seem to circle around the duality of beauty and tragedy, longing, and relief in life. In doing so, she creates a project that feels like one extended sonnet in itself, in the sense that the book lends itself to what Annie Finch said is one of the most useful powers of the sonnet, “the ability to keep a moment, to hold a feeling or experience and turn it around in the light of our awareness until its many facets are evident. This multifaceted quality gives the sonnet a paradoxical feeling of freedom and expanse within confines” (Finch).

The urge to write in and explore traditional form in my own poetry was instigated by the work of Edna St. Vincent Millay, her sonnets, and particularly the poem *I will put chaos into fourteen lines*, the namesake of Annie Finch’s essay *Chaos in Fourteen Lines, Reformation and Deformations of the Sonnet*. In this essay Finch explores the classical history and resurgence of the sonnet along with her own ideas of why the form persists. Finch, like Millay in her poem on the sonnet form, argues that the poetic structure of the sonnet provides space for freedom of expression, or as she quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson, provides the “restraints that make us free.” Both Millay’s and Finch’s work instigated and influenced the first poem in the collection that follows, an ars poetica poem entitled *Chaos in 14 lines*, about the freedom permitted a writer by the confines of a sonnet.

While other poetic forms have experienced new life in the late 20th and 21st centuries, none have lent themselves to full collections to the same magnitude of the sonnet. In *Villanelles*, Marie-Elizabeth Mali and Annie Finch have compiled an anthology of villanelles ranging from the 19th Century through contemporary villanelles of the 21st Century. In her introduction, Finch posits that one of the reasons the villanelle appeals to a diverse array of contemporary poets is

that it is “a democratic form, with origins in communal country dance” (Finch and Mali, 15). The book concludes with a section dedicated to variations on villanelles in which poets have continued to expand the form into new territory. There are two villanelles in the collection that follows and both of those poems deal with subjects that tend to get caught on a repetitive circuit in the mind — anxiety about one’s own death, and the absence of memory of those who have already passed away. I find the villanelle form particularly poignant for poems dealing with subjects present themselves as recurring, almost obsessive thoughts in the brain because of the way lines from the first stanza of a villanelle are repeated throughout alternate stanzas of the poem, until finally coming back together in final stanza of the poem. This mirrors the way recurring thoughts will spread out into connected thoughts, ideas, or feelings, but will ultimately keep returning to the originally recurring thoughts, the primary preoccupation.

More abundant in popular and academic writing than works that draw on poetic structures are those that draw on the female experience more generally. The academic and popular fields are rife with women writing — through both poetry and prose — about their own experience of existing in a female body. Because of historical patriarchal norms, the ability for women to write, especially regarding their own female experience, was hard won and all such writing happening today rests firmly on the works of foundational feminist texts and activists. Some of those foundational texts that have inspired my own feminist journey and the ideas and poetry in this thesis are Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of Women’s Rights*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, the essays and other prose of Adrienne Rich, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, and Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*. Among countless others, works like these lay the groundwork for more contemporary works that also inspired this project and my own journey, including *Untamed* by Glennon Doyle, and *My Body* by Emily Ratajkowski.

In her debut work of nonfiction, Ratajkowski write specifically about her life through the lens of the female body. Because of her work as a model, Ratajkowski is uniquely well-positioned to write about not only about the individual/ personal experience of femaleness, but also the ways in which the female body is portrayed and used in popular culture, online spaces, and politics.

Along with Millay, some of the female poets writing poetry about the female experience that inspired this project include Rachel Eliza Griffiths and her collection *Seeing the Body*, which explores the way grief and trauma manifest in the body and the specific experience of black womanhood; Lucille Clifton; Ellen bass; Marie Howe; Sylvia Plath; Audre Lorde; and *The Moon That Turns You Back* by Hala Alyan, in which she examines place and displacement through the feminine experience, as well as living with the realities of infertility.

I have engaged with these (and other) examples of poetic form, writing of the female experience, and merging the two to create poetry about or through the lens of the female experience. They have not only informed my own understanding of the broader female experience and poetic structures but have inspired ideas and creative avenues to explore my personal feminine experience.

Themes

While the feminine experience, or my own personal experience of the feminine, lies at the heart of this collection, it is not necessarily directly addressed in the way one might expect. Rather, my experience in the female body serves as a thread that connects several themes throughout the work.

My living experience is directly tied to my mother's female experience, her body's ability to procreate, as is every human being that has ever been born. My being born a female only

serves to heighten this connection because it is an experience we have in common. Several poems in the collection are centered around my mother and experiences I have had with her or have observed in her. Additionally, several poems in the collection deal with death, dying, and the questions of what, if anything, happens after death. These questions and thoughts of the end of life are also innately colored by my experience as a woman in this lifetime, as well as by questions of fertility, or the ability to have children. Questions of fertility and childbearing are tied to thoughts and questions of death because children are hoped to outlive their parents and in a certain way, tether a parent to the living world even after the parent has passed away, sort of like links on a chain. Questions of fertility and childbearing bring the continued existence of that chain, the idea of being tethered to this world and existing in other beings, into question. This in and of itself results in heightened feelings of anxiety about death and dying.

Other themes, such as aging, are perhaps more clearly or directly tied to the female experience, because of the way aging and the physical signs of aging are permissible/ acceptable at different levels between males and females. Many women I know work and exist in ways that serve to dismantle the sexist, patriarchal norms around aging as a woman, but I think that culturally, the dichotomy still exists and still influences feelings and anxieties about aging in most women. However, in addition to aging as a mature female, I was also interested in writing about how aging feels as a young female, and in this collection there is a poem that deals with aging as a pre-pubescent female, as well as poems that deal with aging as an adolescent, young-adult female. I think these times of life and aging for girls and young women are particularly gendered, due not only to the ways in which the female body changes and matures during these years, but perhaps even more so because of the way men, and society at large, look at, and interact with maturing female bodies. These changes in the way one is perceived can be difficult

to adapt to and grapple with. What's more, as the female body matures and ages, health concerns related to the female body expand. The experience of deciding how to "deal" with aspects of female biology like menstrual cycles and fertility loom large in a woman's life in a way they do not in a man's life.

Another major theme throughout the collection is the idea of a divine entity and religious tradition. I was raised Catholic and this upbringing, along with my female experience have influenced my thoughts and questions about the divine. One question central to the poems related to this theme is that of the divine as a gendered being, and the patriarchal tradition in religious institutions, specifically Catholicism. In addition to grappling with these questions, the theme of the divine also leaches out into poems that express longings for the ability to have children, to be tethered to the people I love, and my own connection with my mother, sister, and grandmothers.

Other themes throughout the collection include dreaming, waking, and the subconscious mind. This is the part of my life where I experience gender the least and feel most rooted to what might be understood as a soul — the thing underneath all thought, feeling, emotion, the physical body, perceptions of self, and experiences of daily life. Because these experiences — dreaming, waking and the subconscious mind — are less gendered, these poems are also less rooted in concrete elements. Many of them might leave a reader feeling disoriented or untethered to a concrete reality. While this may make the experience of reading a poem less enjoyable, it was a conscious choice writing style that I felt mirrored the experience of these aspects of life.

Lastly, several poems in the collection deal with love and personal relationships. All of these relationships are influenced by my experience existing as a female, whether familial, romantic or otherwise. So, while the themes in this collection may at first glance appear

disparate, they are all connected by the experience of existing as a female. This femininity serves as the thread that keeps each theme tied to the next.

Titles and epigraphs

Titles, epigraphs and considerations of language are central to this project. This collection includes several epigraphs from other poets, musicians, friends, and book characters. Almost all of the epigraphs I included are there because — whether imagery, an idea, or a feeling created by the words — they specifically drove me to the page, because they were the seed of thought for the poem that follows. Like a good title, I think an epigraph can add just one more layer to a poem. They can give insight to what a poet was reading, thinking about, or inspired by in creating a poem. For me, in this collection, the epigraphs included are inextricably linked to the writing of a poem. I will never be able to rid my mind of the image of War Boys, hurtling down the road on open-air vehicles shouting “witness me,” almost desperately to anyone around them before they sacrifice themselves in battle. There is something pure, primal, and humanizing in the craven way these (almost) faceless warriors beg to be seen in their final act of life, their final act of devotion to their cause. I’ll never be able to rid my mind of the image of Nux, specifically, deciding to sacrifice himself for the women escaping the clutches of Imortan Joe, and his face as he points at the women and whispers “witness me” just before he dies for their cause. I’ll never be able to unhear SAINT JHN’s voice asking, “heaven for what?” or Exurba1a saying “stay kind. Walk good. Be.,” or unread “souls cross ages like clouds cross skies.” And once words and images like these marinate in the brain, sometimes only for a few seconds, sometimes for years, they produce works of their own in the form of my writing.

Through my study of poetry, I have come to appreciate the interesting element that titles can bring to a poem. My primary influence for titles throughout this collection is Dr. Mary

Adams. Throughout my study with her she has constantly encouraged me, and other poets in her classes, to consider how a title of poem can bring an added element to a poem. If a title simply restates the first line of a poem, anticipates the ending of a poem, or tries to sum up the idea of a poem, the poet is losing out on an opportunity to enhance the poem, to bring another layer to the poem. Learning this has led to a deep appreciation for long titles that help to situate the reader. While interesting linguistic/ formal choices and mental associations by a writer that may not be clearly evident the reader can make a poem disorienting or unclear to a reader, a title can serve to inform the reader exactly what's going on in the poem they are about to read. In studying poetry I've learned that the preconceived notion many people have about poetry being "hard," or difficult to understand should never really be something we try to do in writing poetry. It's always better for a reader to understand what is going on in the poem, both on a literal and a metaphorical level, and poets, unless there is a specific reason in mind, should not try and obscure meaning from a reader. I think that titles can help this effort along and that is what I have tried to do with most titles in this collection. Additionally, titles can bring in added layers to a poem that weren't necessarily communicated in the poem, but were influences for the poet, or on the poet's mind while writing a poem. One poet who I believe uses titles this way — to add to the poem or to better situate the reader — is Carl Phillips. In his collection, *Pale Colors In A Tall Field*, there are several long, explanatory titles, and several titles that add layers to poems. In the poem *On Being Asked To Be More Specific When It Comes To Longing*, for example, the title situates the reader in a poem of otherwise interesting language and mental associations they may have gotten lost in, unsure of what binds all the language and images together. Another title, *Tugging The Arrow Out*, adds visual and physical layers to the poem that follows about grief and loneliness and how those feelings set in. Phillips' work specifically, as well as instruction from

Dr. Adams, greatly influenced the way I think about titles and the choices I made in writing titles for the poems in this collection.

The title of this essay is a sort of ode to Roxanne Gay's essay, and the namesake for her collection of essays, *Bad Feminist*. Her essay on how she is a bad feminist, which in reality just serves to complicate the image of what it means to be a feminist today, resonates with women everywhere who are aiming toward and fighting for feminism in a patriarchal world. It complicates the image of the feminist as one who can occupy stereotypes of the female and womanhood and still want more and different for women. It complicates the image of the feminist as anyone who wants society to move toward equality of the sexes and dismantles the ideas of what a feminist *should* look or act like. "If I am, indeed, a feminist, I am a rather bad one. I am a mess of contradictions. There are many ways in which I am doing feminism wrong, at least according to the way my perceptions of feminism have been warped by being a woman" (Gay, 462).

Despite being a lifelong writer, before I took my first poetry class during the second year of my English Master's program, I had preconceived and erroneous notions of what poetry is, and how it is created. I had preconceived ideas of who a poet is and who the person is that reads poetry. Until I took Dr. Mary Adams' poetry class, I had the preconceived and erroneous notion that poetry wasn't for me — whether reading or writing. One year later I can sit comfortably with the idea that I am someone who writes poetry. I am a poet. But I won't deny that reservations about the art of poetry and my ability to partake in it still exist within me.

When I read Roxanne Gay's essay on being a bad feminist, I find I can replace feminism and poetry in countless places and clearly delineate my feelings about the art form. "If I am, indeed, a poet, I am a rather bad one. I am a mess of contradictions. There are many ways in

which I am doing poetry wrong, at least according to the way my perceptions of poetry have been warped by my misconceptions about being a poet.”

The lines I’ve quoted open Gay’s essay, but I parallel continues. Where Gay says, “At some point, I got it into my head that a feminist was a certain kind of woman. I bought into grossly inaccurate myths about who feminists are” (Gay, 447). I could say, “At some point, I got it into my head that a poet was a certain kind of woman (or man). I bought into grossly inaccurate myths about who poets are.” And finally, when she says, “I would rather be a bad feminist than no feminist at all,” I could say with confidence, “I would rather be a bad poet than no poet at all” (Gay, 478).

In titling the essay *Bad Poet*, I will admit a certain level of sarcasm. But beneath it is a deeper truth about how, through study and practice, I have come to understand myself capable of something I had always thought was inaccessible to me. While I wouldn’t deign to label anyone’s poetry as “bad,” I do recognize that the poems in this collection are devoid of multitude traditional elements of poetry, save the repeating sonnet, villanelle, and rionard tri-nard forms. Many of these poems are prose poems, written unmetred and unrhyming. They are raw and often literal and tend to depend on my own personal experiences. But they are a testament to a woman finding a love for poetry and understanding a more complicated idea of what poetry is, who gets to do it, and how it is done. As Gay says, “I am a feminist. I cannot and will not deny the importance and absolute necessity of feminism” (Gay). I have come to understand not only myself as a poet, but also the importance and absolute necessity of poetry.

The title of the collection, *The Skinny Dip Club*, was selected because in addition to being a fun, evocative phrase, it also signals certain themes within the poetry — the body, water, and a

certain level of connectedness. Each section has also been given a title, a line from within the section that aims to capture the feeling of the poems that follow.

Contribution to the field

This thesis explores my personal experience of existing in a female body, the inherited connections with female family members this has permitted, the health difficulties and trauma it has caused, and the potentialities of having biological children of my own.

I have tried to build on the connections that have previously been made between the physical body and formal poetic structures. Not only the connections between the proportions of the sonnet and the human body, but specifically the ways in which the female body itself serves as a vessel for both freedom and containment. Additionally, I have explored the ways in which repetitive forms like the villanelle serve to mirror the spiraling, repetitive thoughts often associated with pain, trauma, and anxiety, as well as the multigenerational connections between female family members.

This project may be of relevance to women today who are living with the experience of existing in a point in history when women in our society have more rights than at almost any other point in history but are simultaneously living in a political moment when many of those rights are in jeopardy. What's more, despite the technical rights women have been able to achieve, we are still existing in a world/ society/ system that was largely created by men and for men. So that today, feminist concerns are somewhat subtler — though perhaps just as entrenched — than they have been in the past. I aim to contribute poetry to the field of feminist/ feminine poetry that explores those subtleties through my personal lived experience.

Additionally, it has been said that the job of the writer is twofold — to avoid cliches, and to make people feel less alone. I hope that in sharing my own experience, I can serve as one

more chisel working to dismantle the cliché of womanhood/ feminine experience in favor of the multifaceted reality that exists.

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THE SKINNY DIP CLUB

Chaos in 14 lines,

said Edna. A cell in which the mind can fester,
walls on which to bang the head and crack
the skull in two. 14 measly lines to let loose
all that racks the brain, a vessel to pour joys into
until it shimmers golden blue. What is the feminine
without the tender edges of a body? The touch
of lovers without the skin that borders boundary? A star
without engulfing darkness, a poem without the breath that follows?
And thank God, because chaos sans boundary returns exhausted,
running without end or impact — shouting ever louder
into the voiceless void, silence pressing back black water.
I prefer the 14-line cage for my rage and bliss and chaos,
a place to put today's mysteries that I may return
and laugh at them tomorrow.

MONA LISA ON THE RUN

Flintstone Push Up ®

Before the world told us we were too much, to be small, to be thin, to be quiet, to swallow voraciousness like cough medicine, to listen, to shrink — Betty Jean waltzed into the seafoam living room in the half-dark of dawn to ask if we, nestled in the fold out couch, wanted butter or cheesy grits. Curlers in her big blonde hair, cigarette in her lips, a giant green t-shirt swallowing her loud, tiny body. She felt like whatever color is the opposite of the muted blues and greens of dawn in a living room with the lights still off. And when the fiery Fayetteville sun made even dead pine needles lethargic for a spot of shade or the slightest stroke of a breeze, she'd shout that we didn't need to ask for another Push Up, just go get it. And we fell in love with the giant freezer in the laundry room stocked full of tubs of margarin and bargain pizzas and frozen meat, we fell in love with Betty Jean and the way she used the whole weight of her body to press down on the Push Up to get it started before we were strong enough, and we fell in love with the feeling of sticky orange sherbet running between our fingers, clinging to our chins.

I can still feel her voice, I just can't hear it

Did anyone ever tell you that you could balance an egg to stand on the equinox? Did you ever sit for hours at the kitchen table trying to do it? Did you ever succeed? Did you ever call your grandmother after you did? To hear the soft browns of her voice? Soft browns and maroons like Sunday afternoons? Like 4 p.m. on Christmas eve? Like a glass of white wine with lunch outside when there's nothing else to get done in a day? Like sitting at the dinner table for untold hours even as the sun starts to set and then even the lightning bugs are gone and then even though someone clears the table the spell remains unbroken and someone went and got the guitar and then the soft waves of conversation are laced with attempts at songs that were written in the brown and maroon deluge of quiet afternoons on the carpeted floor of empty living rooms? Me too.

Some days I don't spend time wishing I had curly hair (and the funeral for my grandfather's second wife was one of those days because the end of the third pew ended up being such a thin place I could feel my grandmother, Lee Ann, his first love)

Her ashes, the second lover, rest easy in a box in front
of the altar. Cherry or yew or oak I don't pretend
to know. No way in, no way out, sealed off from the living.
Five daughters, none her own sit rigid in the front row.
She died on the sofa, starved herself to death on purpose after
things got nasty. Chestnut strands glimmer through a curtain
of grey on two of their heads and I recognize the texture,
sheen, color as my own. And their skin is darker too, like hers,
the first love — the true love, we all think, but don't
dare speak — and I can feel her fingers on my face as she tilts
my chin up toward her puckered lips, coaxing
me to emulate, I can feel the coolness of the lipstick
she applies there, her signature color. And I see us turning
to look at two sets of the same eyes that gaze back out of the mirror.

My sister thinks it's important that we all know how we want to die

Death came for Lee Ann over a cup of coffee
at the breakfast table. She had to pass
off the newborn baby in her arms so she
could turn to meet him. He was almost
finished with her when my father picked her
up and ran to the mini van parked in the driveway,
the rest of us left to comfort the baby, insistent screams
railing its proof of life against the invisible taker.
I want to die by a river. I want to feel
the water move over my skin when he comes
for me and watch the sunlight filter through the leaves
overhead. I don't want anyone to run me to a minivan.
I think Lee Ann knew the breakfast table was where she wanted to be,
a newborn's flummoxed face the last vision she wanted to see.

Goodnight moon

When the sun sets on this day, close your eyes
and die a quick death. Let the lifetime since
morning recede into one of the thousand
stories you tell about your life and lie heavy
in the stillness of waking death, where the only
glimmers of life flash by in dark dream. Take comfort
in the ease with which it swallows you whole — death,
with watery black arms wide open, ready and waiting
to embrace you fully and without hesitation, eager to give
you the tiniest taste, a glimmer of what's to come, a reminder
of millennia gone by, practice for the final watery black
infinite. Learn to accept her over and over again so that
when she comes the last time you too open your arms
wide in joyful recognition of the home you've come to know.

What happens in between the living?

Time clicks on and tomb turns womb. Watery
black arms snaking rivers that run murky
blue and purple into warm black brown soup
and there are voices that can't be made out.
Seedy growth responding now to various stimuli
and the cooing becomes clearer and watery unknown
recedes wave by wave by wave until the waves are red
and gasping pressure squeezes away all the great black
and then there are the eyes from before the womb and before
the tomb, with black of their own, and only they can recognize
what's become, can see that certain bonds are resistant to passing
time, certain holds are impregnable, certain connections
cannot be breached or torn asunder. I will find you, keep you,
hold you through the eternal recurrence of tomb and womb.

What keeps you awake at night?

What if this is it?

What if there is no next time, tomorrow or after?

What if the sun never rises again?

Or it does, but you're not there to see it?

What if this is the last pot of coffee?

What if that was the last time your fingers graze their face?

What if you never pick up the pen again?

What if you never kick off the shoes at the end of a long day?

What if that page was the last you'll ever fold and put away?

What if the thin watery darkness of sleep never recedes?

Would you take it with you, or leave it all behind?

Would you wish you'd never known the touch

of a mother's lips upon your cheek?

Or would you take it all again, knowing it's nothing you can keep?

In that outfit?

“it was all a dream” – The Notorious B.I.G.

I watch from within the room as she steps through the curtain and out the window of a hotel room on the 27th floor. And even in the dream I'm not really in the room, somewhere else in dream space watching the scene. But the truth of it rocks me from sleep. I can smell her hair when I'd braid it when she didn't want to wash it. And I'm worried about whether her mother knows yet and about why she'd do it in the same dumpy black dress she was wearing the last time I saw her. But as I wake the real haunt lies down heavy beside me, leaves a dark impression on the second-hand mattress. What if I die alone? What if I lost the only person who's ever really known me? What if there is no one there to stop me jumping, stepping out when the darkness comes? What if it comes one day and never retreats? The eternal, dumpy black dress.

Elegy for the girl who would never have chosen indigo

Eleven years later your bedroom walls wear a deep indigo, the molding stark white. No curtains flutter over the windows like they did when you left them open year-round. The bed rests against the opposite wall and no chest guards the end of the bed where your discarded clothes piled up, where my backpack lay splayed open like a gutted animal for days — weeks — at a time. No half-empty glasses of water adorn the windowsills to gather dust and moonlight. No wet towels hang on doorknobs, exhausted from futile attempts at drying your mess of hair. Dog hairs still float around the room like the first wayward snowflakes trying to find the ground, but now a different breed. Your smell, once permeating everything, has dissipated into the walls or out poorly-insulated windows. It was hard pressed to ever take root in this house so old and you only here a few years.

Eleven years later a smooth, green satin comforter covers a different bed, never crumpled or in disarray from nights spent reading, whispering, stifling violent bursts of laughter. It is never tugged to one side or the other as when we fought for blankets in our sleep. The indigo walls sport little art, but a hundred vacant pinholes suffocate under the paint where all your treasures hung. Each bird with wings made of discarded paper or used labels, every doodle turned masterpiece at the hands of a restless mind. Photographs and medals and dried flowers, some pressed, others hanging onto a branch for dear life, even in death, strung up beneath string lights.

Eleven years later I lay on a soft rug that covers the ancient wood floor of your bedroom, watching the ceaseless spin of the ceiling fan and the sunlight that filters through the thick, rippled glass has a different shape to it. One I haven't come to terms with in all this time, one I am still trying to decipher. I press all ten fingers into the fibers beneath me and listen — I can hear the sounds you made when waking, the heavy thud of your footsteps over these floors, the noisy way you chewed your food and the ridiculous gawk of laughter that erupted from your throat. I can hear you tell me, just once, what it means when you take my hand and squeeze it three times, feel the impossible smoothness of your thin, milky-white fingers. I can hear your over-confident, off-key singing and the lilt of “che, boludo.” I hear your whispers of what troubles you and I hear you speak our dreams of adventure into existence in the dark of night. I hear you wake me in the morning — joyous despite my groggy silence.

Eleven years later this is a nice, quiet bedroom devoid of life

Villanelle for my oldest sister

At night the possibilities of you flood my head.
Eyes swim above my face, glowing brown and green.
The endless not knowing a soft kind of dread.

Your face, forever frozen, cheeks flushed red,
eager eyes thirst for a life they've all foreseen.
At night, the possibilities of you flood my head.

How many bedtime stories had my parents read?
You, listening, too young to understand but keen.
The endless not knowing is a soft kind of dread.

The other brown-eyed-girl, what life would you have led?
What marvels, what sorrows might you have seen?
At night, the possibilities of you flood my head.

In the quiet pre-dawn dark, here in bed,
I imagine you make it to seventeen.
The endless not knowing a soft kind of dread.

Did we have the same skin? What words would you have said,
when me and my sister were curled in bed with you in between?
At night, the possibilities of you flood my head,
the endless not knowing is a soft king of dread.

On being born to a muse

“Show me you can really be your mama’s daughter” – SAINT JHN

“Stay kind. walk good. be.” – Exurb1a

Water lilies reclining on the pond, radiating the same brilliance,
though never resting easy. Sunflowers, but not standing in a vase, Mona
Lisa on the run, hair flung out about her, the starry night always in motion.
A newborn soul in search of the fantastic shape of what comes next, or
an ancient one who’s learned the only thing worth knowing? ‘Stay kind. Walk
good. Be.’ Propelled through days and nights in pursuit of cold,
wild waters, mountains to ascend, rules to break, shining things to behold,
and hearts in need of holding. The one the artists
hunt for because there, there is a life well lived.
There is a human, being. And if, they think, I could
just watch her for a moment, if I could just get closer,
if I could just touch her, hold on, I could copy it all down. Every word,
every angle of sunlight on her skin, every timbre of her laugh,
and isn’t that what will make my art beautiful? Everlasting?

On being born to a muse// the skinny dip club

Light runs through her body,
silken stream of sunlight.
Teach us to live forthright,
we chase her through moonlight.

The skinny dip club

Between the grains of sand at St. Joseph's peninsula state park
phytoplankton reveal bioluminescent bodies
beneath each gargantuan human foot. We drag toes across
the wet sandy surface, delighting in the display that sighs
through the dark, rhythmic expanse. But the glowing life forms are
only a serendipitous prize we all win for being part of the skinny dip club.
There's something about water in the black of night that turns
my mother to a selkie, desperate to return to the depths from which she came.
Only, someone hid her second skin long ago, so she races across the
sand, shedding any semblance of humanity or human self, transforming
to the moment before human, the wild sea creature, locked in the body of a
girl whose skin radiates in the starlit darkness and, hesitant at first,
we chase after her — little butt cheeks glowing white — desperate for a taste
of the wildness we see in her release, desperate to be part of the skinny dip club.

When you reach the end of the Camino de Santiago, keep going

The sound of the water against the rocks
at the bottom of the cliffs is washed in the sound
of her laugh — each occasionally drowning out the
other. And in the light of the setting sun her
eyes glow, like starlings imitating the clouds, thrashing
with life, reckless with the weight of how much
of the world they've seen, guarding a soul
that has given itself over to the world time and time again until
we land here. At the end of the world. El punto de Finisterre.
Where we watch the sun easing into the restless
Atlantic until its fire is burnt into our eyes, shining
even after the world goes dark. Reverberating projections of the way.
Dark chocolate and wine and tired legs and faces sore from laughing
and eyes weary from gazing. What would you take to the end of the world?

I WANT TO SMASH THE UTERUS TO A BLOODY PULP

In a galaxy far, far away... or maybe right here

There is no body to contain or perform,
only what's left when the physical disintegrates.
A small piece of the nothing from which we came,
she floats — unaware of the freedom in nonconfinement
she cannot hurry or dally — it is impossible
for her to err. To be hurt or unloved,
to do harm or harbor fear, anxiety, memories
in the tendons of hips that do not exist.
The palms she does not have do not sweat with
anticipation, the heart she has yet to inhabit
does not race and bound at the thought of her
love's touch, in the mind that remains unformed.
Unaware, blissful, listless, she dances amongst the
nothing — a faint dream of possibility does not trouble her.

This week, she's the size of a softball

After ovarian torsion caused by a mature cystic teratoma

I am unaware that you bloom between my hips. Smaller than a pinhead in the beginning, you grow by millimeters, making space for yourself, carving home and hearth out of flesh and blood, you get comfortable, hold on tight to the bloody walls inside the belly that curves around you, sucking nutrients out of the stream, you attain the size of a softball and choose this moment to make yourself known — pulling my feverish cheek down onto the cool tile of the bathroom floor. When the doctors tell me you are in danger of turning on yourself, exploding and wreaking deadly havoc, I have to swallow the pride that leaches into my throat. The only being I may ever create — virgin conception — a mess of teeth and hair and fat and bone and brain, capable of only destruction, just like your mother.

Me and her (the cyst) are both teenage dirtbags, baby

After ovarian torsion caused by a mature cystic teratoma

She holds no power until she threatens to turn,
another mass inside a body of masses unless
she decides to tear herself open — rip
at the tenuous borders she's sewn
between me and her. Twist and spiral until
her insides explode into the softness around her —
what teenager hasn't felt the power in her own possible
demise? In snuffing out the life they never chose?
But rubber gloved hands snatch her out before her
plans can materialize. They pierce her soft middle
and suck out the juices — all the body — all the
raging hair and gnashing teeth and time-chipped bone.
She slides with all her agency and power up a long slim tube
into the light of day, all her dead wretched glory on display.

My uterus is attacking me

After Pelvic Inflammatory Disease

Pat Benatar almost got it right — only —
my uterus is a battlefield. She is
on the prowl, moving in for the kill, screaming
like a banshee as she comes for the tender organs,
scraping them out with a dull spoon. She reeks
of week-old iron and relishes the taste of clot-riddled
blood relish. You never see her coming, a blazing
swirl of red so red it soups black and brown,
Las Vegas drowning in molten lava — pavement,
dirt, sand, red velvet carpet, and neon light stew.
Girl dinners and smile at everyone, especially presumptuous
old men or else the pain gets worse. Dip my clit in
buttermilk and put a cat underneath it — the inebriated
driver of my pain-dazed mind. Agony hunches
over the girl, not the other way around. I stab
through my skin and tear it all out — how about that?
Dusty's ready to fuckin go. I'll take a knife to it right now,
with the same precision as cutting fat off pork, which is to
say, very little. Careful as a dump truck. The whole thing
will come out smooth in one piece. Hijo de puta,
tú puedes con todo. This knife is glowing like a temptress
in the night and I am answering her call. Slicing through
the silent skin like a banshee's scream.

Bloodless for what? //

“heaven for what?” – SAINT JHN

The new woman, the 21st century woman, the phenomenal woman for sure, perhaps in more ways than one, she is the bloodless woman going about her day to day, week to week, month to month without a drop of the inconvenient stuff, without a moment of hesitation for the white pants, the ivory dress, the crème suit, she moves through the world unstoppable, uncontrollable, unequal. And through the glass circle of time her ancestors watch her unyoked from her time honored oppressor with awe and glee and wonder and just a tinge of sadness as the days and weeks and months wear on and she doesn't stop, doesn't rest, doesn't breathe for even a moment, her body just one more machine.

Get rid of it

“mild, or come not near me.” – Benedick

Do you feel pain when you ovulate? Do you grow cysts on your ovaries? Is your monthly menstrual cycle a source of agonizing pain and danger? No, no, we don't know why, we don't know how to fix it, frankly don't care, what we do know is how to put an end to it, how to stop making it happen, how to eliminate the inconvenience, yes, darling, your pain is an inconvenience to all of us and an expensive one at that, I tell you what, just don't do it, yes, that's right, just shut the system down, just take the whole train off the goddamn track, ok? Yes, yes, that is the best and final answer, end of discussion and if you ask one more fucking question your deductible might double, time to go, ok, patients are waiting, don't speak that way, don't ask those questions, it's dangerous for everyone. In the name of progress.

Naked and afraid and alone and waiting (Are there instructions somewhere for how to wait calmly in what feels like an emergency?)

The plastic model uterus stares haughtily
from its place on the counter and the thin tissue
paper crinkles and scrunches under my bare ass
as I sit through the 13th minute of waiting for
the doctor who it was said would “be with me in
just a minute,” and I’m trying to figure out if the faces on
the pain chart match a perfect crescendo of human
suffering but pulsating light in my eyes is distracting,
changing the color of light on the walls with every beat
of my heart and I can feel the color change in my ears too
and I don’t know if this is somehow related to the fire in my belly,
if I should report it to the nurse who only seemed concerned
with how many drinks I have a week, whether I smoke or have thoughts
of harming myself or others. I want to smash the uterus to a bloody pulp.

AT THE HOUR OF OUR DAMNATION

Always fucking up the boundary between genuine inquiries and pissing people off

Inquiring about God's gender turns out to be an off-color question that garners layers of anger and hurt in human eyes.

So, I don't even get to the part where I ask how could something so all-encompassing, whatever is bigger than everything, be as small as one kind of us? Or try to posit that if there is one ultimate creator creating creative force behind all of everything we know to be true and not — wouldn't it stand to reason that thing might need a womb?

But of course, that's too literal, it's not like there's any way we could have all slipped forth on a silken stream of sunlight from the womb of some great mother — hurtling into this world through the pain and fire of her lusty loins — no way a woman could be responsible for all this.

Hail Mary, One of Us

Hail Mary full of consternation
the lord is suspicious of thee;
troubled art thou among women
and cursed is the fruit of thy womb
if not the product of holy matrimony.
Holy Mary, mother of mothers
dance with us sinners,
now and at the hour of our damnation.
Intercede on our behalf in
the world your sons constructed.
Bless us our bodies, minds and
walk with us, a new path forward.
Blessed be the world in which
the body be thine own. Amen.

Hail Mary, One of Us

Hail Mary full of consternation
the lord is suspicious of thee;
troubled art thou among women
and cursed is the fruit of thy womb
if not the product of holy matrimony.
Holy Mary, mother of mothers
dance with us sinners,
now and at the hour of our damnation.
Hail Mary, full of grace,
the lord is with thee;
blessed art thou among women and blessed
is thy body no matter what. Holy Mary,
mother of mothers, pray for us all, that
we may live the life we choose. Amen.

I. A Prayer

“I live, I die, I live again.” – War Boy

“Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies.” – Zachry

If it can't happen this time – I want to
be a mother next time. Maybe one or two
more lifetimes of practice and I'll be deemed
worthy. Grant me a soul that's in need
of a break in the cycle of eternal recurrence,
in need of love where there's been none.
Because the mother I was granted in
this lifetime taught me what I won't forget in the next.
“There's nothing you could do that would ever make me
love you any less.” And I don't think my soul had
heard that before this life and I promise to give
that to any soul who's put in my charge.
If it can't happen this time, please know
I'm ready next time around. This life taught me well.

II. A prayer

Death will dawn down easy,
sleep-like breaths born bereft
of silken soul, abreast
bright tides blooming rebirth.

III. A prayer

Live breath to breath abreast
the shifts and slips astride
silken light and inside
each pulsing beat. Alive.

IV. A prayer

Our mother who art in heaven hallowed
be thy love. Thy spirit spread, thy
daughters will, fill on earth, and air,
and water. Give us this day our divine
right and propel us on with vigor and
might — to create, cultivate, and
sustain. And deliver us not into the
system's clutches, but deliver us to
unbounded love. Deliver us to a
world as bright as thy sun, as wild
as thine eyes, as bountiful as thy
body. Steep us in the warm mug of
kindness you hold so close to your breast,
and let us rest in your everlasting love.

Forgive me father for I have sinned

It's been years since my last confession. Ok, in truth I haven't been back since the first one, but what I have to tell you has to be said. Has to be heard. I've come to unburden myself. Of evil, unpure thoughts. I have hated myself. So intensely that at times I think I'll never survive a whole life with this self I've got inside me. I have hated her. I think I still do hate her, father, she can be so wretched, and she's always on the verge of total disintegration. She lives in the instant after the trip before the fall. Incapable of coherent continuity. Her remonstrations against forward motion are monsters in the night. Can I be absolved? Is there any penance to purge me of the mess? How many decades on the rosary? How many Hail Marys, Our Fathers, Glory Bes? I've heard we are made in His image, how can that be? If inside of me there are two selves fighting to be?

WITNESS ME

Just kidding, I forgive you, I only remember you because you were the first

A sapling in the midst of dense forest,
growing, reaching, spreading for light, for water,
for air, unaware of the shade of its leaves, the movement
of its branches. A bee balm overflowing with green
until the flower bursts out wild and grasping at the new
day, not worried about the way its petals scatter
into light. A newborn horse, concerned only with
mastering unwieldy legs to walk, to run, to eat, to commune.
So I grew, concerned only for light and air and food — all scabby knees
and ashy elbows and swiftly pulled back hair and crooked teeth, breathless
with laughter and mud-caked toes and I curse the boy in the 6th grade lunchroom
that delighted his friends in staring, the boy who made me look down
and wonder, draw skinny arms around a softening body.
I curse the boy who made me stop.

(Technically) To Lee Ann. But also, I'm glad you'll never read this.

Your necklace broke, or maybe I broke it, either way it came apart and I took it off and with it went your respect for my body, which, to be fair (to be fair), I may have needed to happen to get from Alcatraz to the shore without dying of fear or doubting myself out of the water but then March Madness turned into April and summer stalked in unannounced and still every day I looked at the broken gold chain languishing on the bookshelf in the living room, and I started to wonder if the broken link was me or you or one of the steps in between, I started to wonder if I could love myself the way you loved me, until one day I smashed the open link around its waiting neighbor with some needle-nose pliers to fix the thing and a few days later I looked at the spot on the book shelf and saw it was gone — freaked — but then remembered the silken gold sheen I'd noticed seeping over my body the last few days, the way I relished the body's skin and the sensual, holy intake of breath.

I think I should have learned this lesson a long time ago

It's a grey wet morning in September when I find out
I can't get someone else to hold my sadness. These sorts
of things tend to happen in September. It's where
they feel at home. September offers up sadness on a silver
tray of grey wet mornings and then when you take more
than you need — because what moms always say about
eyes being bigger than stomachs — then she leans over and
her dark glossy brown black hair falls over her shoulder
as she whispers *all for you, darling, don't go passing that around.*
And the hurt and pain and discomfort and confusion must show
in your watery eyes, on your red cheeks because then she reminds you
that everyone already has all they can carry. And then I'm stuck in
the middle of the room with too much in my hands and she suggests
I go sit beside someone in the same boat. *Go give it a rest, sweetheart.*

If grief at night weren't a giant black starfish suctioning you to the bed

“The night was what night always is: a black starfish,” — Carl Phillips

A voice hums through tall grass at night, hushed low
and soft it skitters wild through trees, strips naked,
never having worn a shred of cloth, sheds skin and hair
and tears that pile like clouds before the rain, and trembling,
shaking, stumbles in through open windows and cracked
doors. She rages toward bodies; covets minds at rest.
Listen now. Something wrests you from slumber — darkness,
silence, save the pulsing of a fan or nervous, chirping insects.
Maybe you had never fallen, sleep can be evasive. Either way
she's found you here, best if you lie still. Lurching her bony,
bloodstained body, she needles limbs about your flesh and essence,
every rise and sacred crevice, straddling chest and pinning arms;
she's heavy, massive, monstrous. Lock up, hold fast, wait tight,
she dissipates in the ease of morning light.

All that shit you wish you could forget

Memories rummage through the sheets,
quietly dousing everything in propane,
waiting for the right moment to set it all ablaze and
without warning they swarm my unsuspecting brain.
Or in the glittering sunlight, they break forth and proclaim
this is the moment for a jaunt through the spiral of time.
They crave the cool stillness of a car, bus, or train,
lying in wait beneath each seat, stranger's face or scent.
Eager to overstay a welcome, they feign interest,
care, attention, lingering on the threshold for hours.
Snuff them out by wearing yourself thin,
remain diligent in constant distraction.
Until the moment you tire, let down your guard,
and without warning, you notice you're all ablaze again.

Anesthesia or Drunken Amnesia

I wake in the steel arms of a hospital bed,
thin, cold, narrow, and accentuating how
hot, fleshy, bloated, I rise. Once, a kind
man with a strange accent tells me it's
ok to cry, it happens all the time. Once, an
orderly Spanish nurse scolds me for tearing
the IV out of my arm before I know what I've
done. But she doesn't stop me.
And as the cool dark hallway retreats into
black tears on my cheek, I hear his voice
again — it's ok to cry, it happens all
the time. The push and pull of forgetting and
remembering, he'd said, forced upon us against our will
will produce this. I will be alright. I wish he'd say it now.

If no one knows I'm gone

“Witness me.” – War Boy

Why does it matter?
The pages, pictures, proclamations, pain.
I want you to witness me.

All I ask is you remember,
or maybe even never forget.
Why does it matter?

I want you to feel it when I'm gone,
in the black pit of your stomach.
I want you to witness me.

I want you know your experience was altered
by the fact of my existence.
Why does it matter?

What if I'm gone and nothing cries out?
Was I ever here at all?
I want you to witness me.

Nothing more than one among masses,
nothing less than one who has loved.
Why does it matter
that I want you to witness me?

TO BECOME WHAT I ALWAYS WAS

Ode to Avellanas

When Avellanas woke me, I was sleeping
fitfully. She rested her hand on my hot cheek
and kept it there, still. She pressed her lips to my forehead
and then lay her chin on the top of my head, sharing
the withered pillow. She traced cool fingers over bruises
that littered sun-darkened limbs. She was quiet. She didn't
ask questions — never urged me to open my eyes — just
waited patiently for me to do so.
She spoke softly in my ear — her warm breath barely
rustling hairs on my head — of brighter/ easier days
ahead, but didn't ask me to rise. We lay there envisioning
what she described. Watching a possibility
of future materialize on the dawn-dark white ceiling and listened
to the persistent roars of howler monkeys beyond the open window.

Biarritz

“Like water for chocolate.” - Tita

Witches to the water we skirt sandy stones to worship
in the frothing mouth of a pebbled sea who's belly
presses flat against the watery black sky. A coven
of young gangly half-drunk bodies alight with each
other, searching for solace in the unrest of adolescence,
searching for something that feels like water on skin,
salt on the thin reaches of elbows and knees, not even
the cool rain running between everything can stop us.
Witches to the water we plunge body after body
after half-naked body into the tumult that cannot promise
our return, that turns us all into Esther Greenwoods,
compelled to swim and push and swim between great
black bellies, between slips of rain until nothing remains
and we are somewhere from which we cannot return.

Sometimes it takes putting your brain in a blender to remember the person that was inside the person before the person became a person

“He tells the number of the stars; he calls them all by their names.” — Psalms 147.3

“Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
— Micah 6:7-8

I want to go back to the girl who carried
rocks home from the woods, let them pile up
in a box in the closet. I want to go back to
the girl that couldn't keep track of her shoes and
had to be bribed into wearing real clothes. I want to
go back to the girl who had books about the stars
and tried desperately to understand, to memorize, to see.
I want to go back to bows and arrows and pride rock.
And tell her that no matter how far she strays and
how dark and confounding the road becomes and no matter
how long she may forget, that one day, years later, she'll
wind up driving home from the river with a piece of mica in her
pocket and she'll lie and stare in wonder at the stars as it gets dark.

On the back of an old envelope

Someone put my brain in a blender
and threw it out the window. Months later,
when everything settled, congealed, the grass
was more luscious. At least where the brains
had been. No matter how hard I try,
I can't remember what it felt like
before the brain window blender debacle.
But the people I love keep getting brighter and
the light pierces the cracks of my
blended brain. Bright like all light
looks during a migraine only minus
the pain. Vibrating like little swimmers
in my vision until I can see everything except exactly
what I'm looking at. When did I stop losing my shoes?

How are you handling this whole aging thing?
You don't pluck out every grey hair you find?
Well, good for you.

"Time is the speed at which the past decays." – Somni 451
"Sometimes I just get sad thinking about how more people
didn't get to see my boobs in their prime." — Sam Blasciak

Betrayal feels like going grey before getting a job
with health insurance. Losing an ovary before
graduating high school. Wrinkles etching
themselves before the pimples are done
pimpling. Boobs sagging before the right people get
to enjoy them. Knees aching in a cramped
car on the way to the club. Spots on the hand
no one has any interest in holding onto forever.
And everything falling, falling, falling and hurtling
forward around you before you know what you're
chasing or where the race started or where it's headed
or what shoes you're supposed to wear or how to do your hair.
It feels like all that happens is every time you look in the mirror
you see the version of yourself 10 years from now. It feels like a curse.

The rain is probably also in love with you

“quiero comerte la cara” – Rosalía

Your breath beats big, steady.
Rain drops route small detours
down panes of your contour,
knows too of your allure.

I always wanted to wear glasses

I didn't know I needed glasses before I met you. Didn't know what I wasn't seeing, couldn't envision what was out of focus, couldn't see what I couldn't see clearly — all the bodies of water and mountains and questions and pages and sunrises and wildness and rocks and gasps and deep breaths and Sunday mornings that were so swiftly passing me by. From my vantage next to you I could make out the shapes of your dreams hanging clearly before you, right at eye level, like the light hanging in front of that fish that lives in the depths of the black ocean, always moving, bobbing just out of reach. Always chasing forward knowing you'll never reach them before the light glistens a new color on silvery scales, a morphed shape, and they are out of reach again. It made me wonder about my own dreams I'd let get grimy, forgotten in the black depths of a Hermione Granger bag, lost in the mess of being on the run. Lost in the stillness of a life on the run. I guess what I'm trying to say is thank you for letting me stand beside you. For passing me those glasses I'd always been told I didn't need.

That old saying people invoke on boats

“Snap your finger// stop the world — // rain falls harder.” – Jack Kerouac

Red sky in the morning, lovers take warning. She's
putting on a brilliant display of the way she can force
you to be still. Together. The kind of stillness that tastes
like blue. The lay in bed in half-dark day kind, with
windows open and rain sighing down the breeze kind.
The eating a late breakfast in your underwear kind,
the come close just so I can hear your breath kind,
the readjust just so that any part of our bodies are
touching kind. She rears her powerful head and
thunders you inside beside the side kick you
chose. Love gently, she says, while I rage. Love easy,
she says, while I let loose. Show me how sweet you
can be, you who won't be here forever, you who's only
truth is that you *will* have to say goodbye. You, human.

Somewhere between Azure and Cerulean Blue

In the dream, the house is the exact shade of blue as the boat
I find myself in two days later. So that by the time I climb into
the small vessel, the color is familiar — a memory — erupting from
the surface of subconsciousness. And the dream comes back in waves as the
boat is thrust from the beach into ferocious surf, angling against an ocean
swarming grey, that disappears at the horizon into a sky seething with storm.
Other things surface too —
the tint of copper in a cascade of otherwise black hair, the smell of
onions and peas cooked in rice until bloated and colorless, the shape of
a nose, skin that couldn't belong to anyone else and the glow of green
eyes on a dark body. A sensation of anticipation interlaced with the knowing
that something sacred has taken root. Fear and pleasure and hope all churning
in formidable froth. And as I enter the blue house, across the cool tiles of the porch,
I am integral and miniscule, alternatively submerged completely and rising from the center.

You vs. the bitch (that is, my subconscious)

At night, when the jaws of subconscious consume me, she awakens, lithe and eager to exploit all she can dredge up in the mind. She tiptoes through the swamp, shaking terror into being, yanking agony from its roots, digging plunder and doubt from cold, sandy soil. She pokes and prods them until hot and angry like a bull at the point of a picador, they rush their creator in one, frantic attack. Every memory, every wrongdoing, every endless tragic possibility spills forth from their grimy, swollen throats and with bloated fingers they paint images that can never be erased. Through the poison-laden clouds a hand reaches down — giant, warm, and smooth. It knows exactly where she's left me, tied up under a thorny bush, and the weight of it makes her shudder, makes her run, twists her stomach until she expels me through the very mouth I was consumed, dripping in the sweat of her saliva, trembling at the speed with which I've transcended her world.

Inside me

“Inside me is a black-eyed animal bracing in a small stall.” – Terrance Hayes

Inside me is a dark blue creature made of watery limbs struggling to get free of the mud that keeps covering its eyes, grimy between limbs and toes and fingers, thick and heavy and impossible to get rid of. Inside me is a watery blue creature caked in mud, trying and failing to stand up, to see clearly — those dreams when you can’t run or walk or lift your arms or open your eyes. Inside me is a creature made of indigo water that washes clean mud-caked mysteries and navigates mud brown rivers with ease to find communion at the edge, to coagulate and carry on, forever flowing through the porous moments, shifting smooth over rocks, reflecting light under the sun.

Needmore, remember me the way I was

Needmore, remember me the way I was, eyes latched onto a shudder of movement in the air, a flash of yellow talon on the shoulder of the mountain, the thrush of great wings, brown as river rock, and the twitch of a cloud-white head. Needmore, remember me the way I was, a gasp of river-wet air, a bundle of limbs crouching in wait to watch as long as the branch held the body, millennia of stillness and no time at all before wings crash on and disappear upriver, out of sight, on to I don't know where. Needmore, remember me the way I was, slipping through water in the river that is never the same river, through water that knows the way I was, before, and can tell me who I am backward and forward in time. Needmore, remember me the way I was, hold the veil, Strazza's alabaster gauze, that I may reach through and become what I always was, what will be forever and never more.

Divine right// pleasure
Vine ripe and well ready
she slips silken feline
limbs through time to align
body and mind, divine.