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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kierstyn G. Lamour entitled "Appeasing the Animal." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

Marilyn Kallet, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Art Smith

Amy Billone

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

APPEASING THE ANIMAL

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kierstyn G. Lamour
May 2010

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ABSTRACT

"Appeasing the Animal" is collection of thirty-two poems that represent a fight and conciliation between the civilized self and the spectrum of human needs in a socially constructed reality. These explorations were split into male and female representations of the human psyche. This intersection is also a place that investigates mothers & daughters, politics, sex, crisis, religion, and other important points of dramatic conflict.

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APPEASING THE ANIMAL
INTRODUCTION

Critical Introduction

Writing a critical introduction to my own poetry is a bit like writing a poem about craft; as Ruth Stone says in her poem, "Always on the Train," "Writing poems about writing poems/is like rolling bales of hay in Texas./ Nothing but the horizon to stop you" (Stone 2003). When faced with this task, it is impossible to ignore my desire to go back to the very beginning, to the girl at her desk with a pen who is trying to make something beautiful out of a mature truth. My mother, diagnosed with breast cancer when I was a young girl, lived with it for seven years before she died. Not all poetry comes from such dramatic struggles, but for me, the understanding and developing connections made about the world through poetry is a performance of this complex knowledge. Poets are gifted with a division from convention, allowing for a unique sight or vision of our same, conventional world from an outsider's perch. It is through these observations—the close reading a poet does of culture, family, society, religion, politics, and art—that forces its way out and begs to be redesigned and discovered as something new. It is dangerous practice, sometimes, to call out to one's fears, or recognize major faults in myself and in humanity, but I feel like this is what makes a poet's work important. The truth, vulnerability, and beauty revealed in art is why I read and why I write.

The title of my thesis, "Appeasing the Animal," is a culmination of efforts to marry incongruent forces within me that compete for visibility, for truth, in the art I

produce. Within these pages you will find mothers of all kinds. To be defined, a mother does not stand alone in this identity; besides the child, she also needs to establish her connection to her male counterpart, and in this manuscript, he can be represented as a god, a husband, a scientist, a musician, a hunter, or even a shirtless jogger. The male figure also struggles with his creativity and reproductive contributions. I have separated the female-centered poems from the male-centered poems by "Anima" and "Animus," so named by Carl Jung as representative of the feminine and masculine parts of our own psyche.

In high school, poetry was defined and outlined for me by my teachers as presented by Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Coleridge, and William Carlos Williams among others, but it was not until I took a contemporary literature course and was introduced to Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath that I discovered how poetic language could function in a way I connected with intensely. Particularly, I felt that Plath and Sexton could work through an emotional content containing authentic pathos and unfiltered truth without removing themselves from the art itself. I felt like they gave me the tools I needed to become not only a reader of poetry, and eventually a writer as well. Though I have had a private war with the term, "confessional," because I feel its label signifies a lack of understanding about boundaries of self-importance and the art itself, I agree with Sharon Olds in her poem, "Take the I Out" with her lines, "But I love the I…/it soars between them/like the soul that rushes, back and forth,/between the mother and father…" (Olds 1999). To be apologetic about one's own I is the crime; the drive to

get to the universal truth that identifies the self in the act of discovery is what I value most, and where I want my poems to arrive.

In Dorothy Allison's essay, "This is Our World," she argues that it is the artist's job to provoke uncertainty and create more questions than answers, whether this is achieved with visual media or through the written word in art (Allison 2006). Allison's vision of the artist's imperative strikes me in several ways with regard to poetry, in what I seek as a reader and a writer. While I read poetry with the hope of experiencing revelation, I see how poetry can also be regarded as a social risk; according to Allison, it is because the artist has been granted a vision that keeps her/him outside the conventional, polite gates of society (Allison 2006). For me, this allows the dialogue to begin between the cultured self and the animal self in art. The animal delivers the vision to the poet, and it is her job name the observation, to bring it to the outer world. This vision allows an artist to see truth, and compels her/him to sing, dance, entertain, or paint a way into bringing an audience into unearthing the unique vision the artist understands and needs to share. If the art is successful in what it is doing, the audience—so seduced by the color, by the pathos, the way the bodies move in the dance, or the melodious notes—is engaged in a way that allows them to be open to seeing or hearing or experiencing a part of life they may not necessarily have chosen to discover on their own. While I don't think that all art is so scheming, I believe the kind of art I seek out and the kind of art I try to write falls somewhere along these lines. I think the artist revealing her experience in a recognizable way through the art is also dangerous.

I was privileged enough to see Dorothy Allison perform/read her work when she visited the University of Tennessee last year and noticed that one of the key emotions she relies upon to reach her audience is humor. Wielding the transformative properties that are inherent in humor is very attractive to me as a writer. To have the power over tragedy through humor is a hard transformation to make on the page, and to make in poetry. Allison says that art "is not meant to be polite, secret, coded, or timid. Art is the sphere in which that impulse to hide and lie is most dangerous. In art, transgression is holy….and pursuing one's personal truth the only sure validation"(Allison 2006). This validation is what I find when I read "Aliens" by Kim Addonizio who writes these lines: "Now that you're finally happy/ you notice how sad your friends are/…She's tired all the time, can barely eat/You yourself are ravenous./You come so intensely with your new lover/you wonder if you've turned/into someone else./Maybe an alien…" (Murray 2009). I love the removal of the social layers—the transgression—anchored by truth, humor, and passion to bring readers to a deeper meaning in this poem. The irreverence contained within the narrative is what binds me to the writing, allowing a participation that only poetry can provide.

In Dr. Art Smith's and in Dr. Kallet's graduate seminars, we spent time working on many poetic forms I had never tried before. Robert Hass's long line from "Time and Materials," challenged me to rethink my traditional short line and explore length in my poems, "Men Stop Hunting at a Certain Age," and "Medusa's Head is the Prize" among others. This restructuring allowed me a freedom and an exploration that was invigorating. The next step from this long line was the prose poem, which we studied at

length. We explored their boundaries, their essentials, their seductive qualities, and their failures. I have included four of these prose poems in my thesis, "My Mother's Nipple," "White Mattress," "Tarantula," and (the hybrid) "Virgin mary" poem from these explorations. I appreciated getting to work with this contemporary form and read incredible works by Robert Hass, James Wright, Margaret Atwood, and one of my favorites from James Tate. In particular, Tate's poem, "There's a Certain Point in Each Evening..." begins, "There's a certain point in each evening when I have to put on some really soul-shattering rock-and-roll music and comb my hair into this special fright-wig," and ends:

So what it's been burgled. The heirlooms. Mother's rings, father's cufflinks.
They go to a distant island and get robbed there. It's the same everywhere.
Read the great poets, listen to the great composers. It's the same everywhere.
The Masters. The Thieves.

I love that he is able to take his irreverent "fright wig" and blow it up to the world of poetry, art, and then comment, in a bold way, about materialism, about our values, and the entirety of human nature. Only in the prose poem does the ending depend on such stunning revelations—with so much prose text padding the interior of the work, the title and the ending have a particularly important job of carrying the weight of the entire piece, as Tate's poem does quite nicely.

The prose poem can be viewed by poets as a form that gives up something too essential —the line break, or rather—the power of the line break. Is the prose poem regarded as David Lehman describes: "prose tarted up to ape to the supposed prettiness of verse" (Lehman 2003)? I disagree on all counts of whoring, aping, and prettiness, but I do think its form is appealing to a 2010 audience. It is less intimidating than other

recognizable forms like the sonnet or heroic couplet. Gary Young, in his essay, "The Unbroken Line," describes the prose poem as having a two-natured identity: "it looks like prose but acts like a poem…[it is] poetry that disguises its true nature" (Young 2008). Here again, I agree with Allison's assertion that the artist, the storyteller or poet, is charged to entice the reader into discovering epiphany or truth holds true. I don't mind the assertion that the audience must be lead into a work of art, and I think the prose poem is the perfect venue to execute this idea.

Visually, the way the prose poem is placed on the page might help a new audience to take a chance on its appearance. What I hope to gain is the respect through the work presented in this form adhering to the standards of conventional poetry in a more immediately gratifying way. Or, at least, the prose poem can *act* or behave in a way that is more familiar to an audience that is used to reading blocks of text instead of the intimidating, shortened line.

Inspired by James Wright's "Regret for a Spider Web," both by its title and prose poem form, I composed "Tarantula" last semester, hoping to interest an audience in material that may be incongruent with traditional, poetic subjects, and decided the prose poem style would fit nicely with it as well. For me, Wright's piece is about truth and discovery. In my own work, I strive to emulate the resonance of his ending lines: "I wish I could tower beside her forever, and be one mountain she can depend upon. But my lungs have their own cities to build. I have to move, or die" (Friebert 1995). Wright's poem is working in both of the most important ways I want my poems to work—the title

is present and active during the poem—and contributes to the transformation at the end. It is the kind of poem that must be read again immediately.

There is also an equal amount of pressure on the success of the title of a prose poem to do more work for the poet and the prose poem itself. The title of James Wright's poem "Regret for a Spider Web," is already doing a great amount of work without the security of any other text around it. It is posing a question to humanity: How *can* one have regrets about a spider web, let alone *for* one? It has sorrow, it has a surreal quality, it has elements of the natural world, and it also promises a transformation of understanding. The reader is going to learn something completely new from this poem. I contend that this prose poem is an entire cinematic experience; as surreal as a Dali painting, as poignant as a ballad, and the title lets the reader in at precisely the right moment.

Another prose poem I rewrote last semester was a poem originally titled, "King Size" that is now "White Mattress." I wanted to convey a setting or a moment that could serve both as place and a situation. I am interested in its texture, but not sure if I am over-telling with my prose lines. Too "confessional" perhaps? It is a huge temptation, especially when trying to show the audience a vision of truth, even if it is about the most mundane of subjects, like a bed or how one's mother eats toast.

My poem, "Deliquescing Beauty," has gone through numerous title changes and forms. While it started out in a prose poem form, it eventually needed to have shortened stanzas, but kept the long line. I changed the title from "Amanita Virosa" to give it a

lyrical identity, giving it a quality of the mushroom, instead of just its name, translated as "destroying angel."

I know I rely heavily on pathos in my work, wielding emotion to help drive the narrative, and I think experimenting with new forms (at least, new to me) helps break a writer out of her own bad habits. My persistent use of the pronoun "I" (though I despise my dependence on it, I find it brings an authenticity to the emotion that is hard to achieve without its narrative perspective) is a place I hope to break down and investigate in the future. My imperfect sestina, "Love Poem," was a personal triumph for me with form, and finding the right six words helped me create something not so much about love, but the fear of its loss, or never experiencing it.

The desire for the conflict and resolution is present in both of the sections of this thesis. The tension for control between the anima and animus is a driving force in my work, and I agree with Dorothy Allison's assessment of the artist's mission: The job of the poet is to use her experience, her cunning, her seduction, her humor, or her horror to bring an audience into her imagination or vision to participate with this experience. And I hope you will.

ANIMA

My Mother's Nipple

The prosthetic was beige, pliant. She'd leave it on the bathroom counter. The nipple itself was quite small, always erect--too perfect as it protruded from the center of the illusion. It was cold; not like a human breast, but had all the weight of one. Sometimes I would take my friends to see it (I don't think they wanted to) but maybe they were curious like me; about what it was going to be like to have the real thing sticking out of our own chests someday, times two.

The scar where the real breast had been removed was as pink as a nipple. The tip of the line peeked out of the top of her eyelet gowns, scaring me as much as a blade. When she was angry and yelling, I'd stare at her chest instead of her face, but the scar was its own eye, looking into mine. Even now I have to shut them and say *I'm sorry, I'm sorry.*

Love Poem (an imperfect sestina)

It is difficult to feel love evenly
his cinnamon and sugar stubble can scratch
the place between my lip and nose, so vulnerable
over his desktop like a paper
weight shoved to the side of nonsense.
It's hard to pick out the emotional jewel.

Like my mother's favorite jewel
not marquise or pear or teardrop, the stones evenly
set into a wedding ring that represented nonsense;
practical, she told me he was so dull he couldn't scratch
glass, not like a gem but a floppy rag that wilts at the sight of her vulnerable
places. She is the cut that gets between fingers by paper

the kind you only find after squeezing a lemon on paper
towels though they don't absorb the pain, each jewel
a domestic perforation that wears a woman down to the vulnerable
fiber, each striation coming apart evenly
to the point of disintegration, nothing left to scratch
but the itching overwhelms the nonsense.

Of course there is nothing left of love but nonsense
after awhile. Written down with lead on paper
a woman can see the contrast from white to dark scratches
even if she is blonde and stunning, she certainly has a jewel
of something everyone wants; never vulnerable
but anyone who believes that is not made evenly--

Love takes unevenly
because nobody "gets" what she "wants" from love--what nonsense!
Loves makes the heaviest weight vulnerable
covering a rock with paper
there is never a big enough jewel
so love is open to the claw, the bite, the scratch

This is all on the surface though, just a scratch
his face is shaved so evenly
it could be mistaken for glass or a jewel
or something made from other parts, a collage of nonsense
unwrapped paper
disposable or vulnerable

The truth about love disintegrates evenly; it scratches
the vulnerable parts, pelting like rain on paper
until it transforms nonsense into jewels.

My Mother's Ashes are Sea Spray

This is what I say to the salty air:
You wouldn't let us bury you,

so you burned.
I resent it sometimes.

I wish I could dig into the earth where you should be and
plant Narcissus, Daffodils, and Crocuses over you.

I'd separate the clusters each year as they multiply and
keep planting.

Miscarriage

Midnight again.

From where I lie
the trees' fingers are all arthritic.
Pain from these frozen poses
emphasize their slowness.
Slow to grow.

They are reaching out to the power lines
those ugly,
empty staves of music,
reminding me that the notes are missing.

I raise my hand from the bed
to fill in this emptiness backlit by moonlight
and put finger shadows between the bars

but I only see lumpish mitts
that know nothing about composing
or how to change this song.

The Evolution of Roaches

Who was the first scientist
to pull the head off a roach
and watch for 9 days
as she lived,
headless?

Did he perform the insect autopsy with zeal
cracking translucent scarab shell
to find her stomach
full of children?

He hypothesized
her body could still mate
or even lay eggs
if she could feel her way to the right place.

Without a head
there was no way to tell her
she was a mother or
that she was dying of starvation
but still able to give birth.
She couldn't say that she was hungry.

It was miraculous,
even if he only marveled
at the welded edges
of what she was missing.

Exposed

I run up the stairs and feel
my heartbeat
in the wrong place

my kids look at my face, ask:

"Mom, what's wrong?"

eyes wide
hand over my mouth

it hurts
        I tell them
it hurts.

Mother's Bleeding Hearts in Bloom

I think this may have pleased her
not the sentiment

her foresight

to wrench out
a hunk of earth and
force it to grow
something pretty.

Deliquescing Beauty

Like the other fairytale, Amanita is also lying down in white.
Her sleeves drop spores under folded arms
silk too soft to touch without tearing.

With so much light I anticipate warmth but she is early frost
refractions of beauty
thousands of gills, delicate filter, easily crushed.

Her head is half buried in the ground. With her good eye,
she can see me over sprouted moss on her cheek. My love
mushrooms. I stand on one leg, growing out of her.

Wonder Woman

Diana
I wanted to change my name
when I saw you jump over a fence
when I saw the crow's wings
through your hair
I wanted to spin around
and around
transformed
to Diana the wonder woman.

My mother bought
the doll of you
and I held you
barely clothed
your nippleless breasts
looked more like
humps on a camel—
what kind of woman were you?
Diana, wonder woman.

Somehow your star-spangled ass
and the golden eagle across your breasts
with long-wearing Revlon lips
did not make you into
my hero, no
Diana
but I hear your name
on waitresses
and mothers
and bosses
I hear your name, Diana
and I still want it
I still do.

This is a Picture of Me

I am a cheetah
shoulder blades
grind under thin skin and
I'm running away
as fast as claws can grip earth

or maybe I'm running toward something
can't focus at this angry speed—

and then I see it—
a loping wildebeest
older, weakened by judgement

and I can't help myself
my mouth opens
teeth crave to bite,
to rip and tear
until the blood warms me

but it grows cold so quickly
there is no sense of satisfaction
in fact
the nausea overwhelms

and I can see that
in my eyes
in this picture
in this moment

Underground

It comes through the paper
the seeping end of thoughts about her
the mother
tangled like veins around a tumor.

I dig.
Find chocolate earth
rich with memory loss
and clues left by birds
scat riddled with bones and teeth

an excellent isle for enamel to dissolve
a destructive place of attraction.

Ollie's Song at Naptime

With all the seriousness of Beethoven
his open mouth shows a cavernous stage, tonsils like
timpani drums at the base of his tongue
conducting his throat's symphony

"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,"

My tune clashes with his complexities
his waves of sound crash into me
the stressed mother, who only knows about rest.
Hush, hush baby: Listen to me sing:

"You make me happy, when skies are grey,"

Furious now, his red face soaked under tears,
his song keeps coming with fire
hydrant pressure into me and my attempts at comfort
as he grabs my chin with a fingernail and scratches

"You'll never know, Dear, how much I love you,"

We look at each other in the eyes and I want to give in
to this much passion. His great breaths have inserted
a staccato rhythm that can't be sustained. Finally, with his
head on my shoulder, he gives in. He listens.

"Please don't take my sunshine away."

Medusa's Head is the Prize

The snakes feel weighty today; the coiling and uncoiling of bodies wears me down. With so many eyes I can see they don't want to be attached to my head anymore either.

I hear footsteps. Another quest for my head, already? As if one man could outshoot me. As if my blood wouldn't snake a trail down his forearm and burn into his heart.

I wonder if he knows I had a different set of powers once. I could have seduced him out of his sword and shield, chocolate hair curls instead of serpents.

He's close. I close my eyes and listen to his breath. Should I give in? Let him have my snakes? *Come now son*, I rattle, *step into me*.

Notes I've Collected For my Dead Mother

my mother wanted
children
when she was 34
the same year she was born
in Detroit
and my grandmother told me
she had 41 skirts
to wear to school
she was never decorated the same
twice
in one month

so she had these children
three two one
and they were not so pressed
or pleated
they grew out of new wrinkles
slower than
the malignant ones she grew into

and when she turned 52
her children were not older than
her wedding ring
so she divided her jewelry among them
giving them something
unreligious
arranging her funeral
around a church they did not know

and people came to her with
baggy faces
and moist hairlines
wiping and nodding
wearing something mournful
and someone thought I looked
appropriate
in my black skirt french braid
peering into the coffin
to look at the paper bag colored skin
in a wig
and a fuchsia dress.

A good job, they told me
yes a fine job
someone over said

and they saw her ring
attached uneasily
touching my dried hands
telling me they wouldn’t burn her
jewelry and I
haven’t worn any since.

ANIMUS

White Mattress

I always thought the king sized mattress would be the ultimate swimming pool, large enough for mature, hairy toes and rosy underthings, but mostly it is a place to get lost. It is not contained. Sometimes I stretch a whole leg over to the other side and find no balance, no purchase.

I take the sheets off to discover the story, the texture underneath. The pillow top, quilted padding is forced to stay in place with delicate, permanent stitching faithfully beneath us. There are patterns of flowers here, gentle indentations impossible to see under thinning sheets and washed comforter. This is white on white under white in white.

Valentine's Day to New Lovers

the best kind of sleep deprivation
where skin is the warm drug
that keeps us naked for days
where I can't eat enough of you
and you can't hold enough of me
smoking cigarettes after chocolate
and red wine for dinner

when we are forced outside
our bodies freeze inside ordinary clothes
        what is work?
                what is food?
I'm still communicating with you even though
I'm asking a man how he liked his lunch
        feeling your hands inside my blouse
                I think:
Chambord over truffles tastes like you.

Tarantula

He slips between my ribs into my lung. He becomes spider-sized, trapped in the upper branches of connective tissue. They hold me down under the CT scan, stick a needle through my back like a wasp-to-get-the-spider but it collapses easily, a trick, a paper lantern. Can't breathe. The nurse looks away while the doctor's hair turns marigold before I get back to myself. *It's part of me now,* I tell them, *you'll have to kill us both.*

Men Stop Hunting at a Certain Age

There will always be abandoned tree stands, remnants of doe urine
smeared on the trunks below the feet of hunters determined to attract prey.

This is when nature is at its meanest; leaves no longer protect
limbs from indiscriminate winds.

The hunter's cheeks have been exposed to many winter morning and they burn
for hours after he gets inside. He begins to resemble bark.

His garage is full of skeleton trophies and mounted skulls, a monument of evidence
stripped of fur, bones bleached from meat.

He thinks about each arrow he used to penetrate the skin in a meaningful way
not just to show his friends, but how it felt—the power of taking.

The old hunter still sits in a tree stand at dawn, not caring that he can't mask
his real scent anymore. Good for him.

Parts

When I was still in Eden
I often spoke like I had eaten
from the tree
but of course I had no idea
what a penis was
or how frequently it rose
like a serpent between anyone's legs.

I tried to play it cool
like it was no big deal that
I had been tricked into touching it
in the dark. My hand recoiled
as if bitten.

If he had cared about my face
he would have seen the shock
at my discovery of such a
hidden
mechanical part
on a human being.

I didn't want to know it was part of
my father or my counselor Mr. Jewel--
that all of them lay in their beds
with this urgency
of wanting someone else to touch them
at a place no young girl discovers
on her own.

My Husband's Perfect Woman

she would definitely
like to live
in the woods
and be able to use
unraked leaves
as decorations
in her hair
or home

she would be a little rugged
a little
thick skinned
and she'd look
something like
an orchid–
woody, but punctuated
with exquisite
limbs

sometimes I imagine her
reading German philosophers
on the toilet or
how she'd find it easy
to feel sorry for women
who run to the mall
sometimes
to relax

she'd make the perfect points--
able to puncture moods
and deflate pop culture
all from the wooden rocking chair
she whittled
herself

My Father's Collection

I found hotel soaps
in his bathroom downstairs,
the small bars filled the bottom drawer
waxy paper
over deeply grooved
letters that spelled
exotic places I'd never been.

I unwrapped the whole drawer once
unnoticed.

Did he ever look
at their peachy skin
so open
clean

their perfume expiring
in a drawer
near bathroom floor.

Partial Moon at Twilight

A man's nipple sticks out
of his sky blue shirt.
It asks to be pinched.

Fall is not so easy
to ignore

garish color
against whiteness
plump illusion.

Pan, on a Shelf

He had the unusual beauty
of a bell pepper jaw line
I noticed while he let me
dig around in his earth

where I had mistaken his hooves
for cowboy boots.
He played guitar instead of pipes.
It was a decadent magic.

There were women tucked
everywhere
in his shoreline
behind scotch pines
stashed
like morning glories
winding the trunk
of his thigh
only blooming during
the early morning hours

I want to know how his music
continues to play for women
even after his appearance
changes
from God
to man
to goat.

Genesis, or How God Set Out to Create An Image of Himself

He didn't start at the face;
He caressed His own chest
liked the feel of fingertips
over the nub of His nipples.
He didn't think about what they don't have
the ability to feed.

He closed His eyes
felt the shape of His left arm. He wished someone else
was raising the hair just under his skin: Imagine!
A feathered touch across His glorious back,
His perfect curves could be felt in a way
He cannot feel.

What about hips? Not merely the socket
for connecting leg to spine, but a softened ridge
the right place for another palm to feel
the bone edge
under pad of skin.
A place to be adored.

He wonders if this man should be His partner,
after all, they are identical, and He is perfect.
God looked at the man with the seriousness of an erection
but the man stared blankly, a baby bird in the nest.

So God made more men. He modified their bodies,
giving some marigold hair, pollen skin,
widening or rounding their shoulders.
He stretched their legs, taking care
to elongate the thighs in some,
bulging the calves in others. Hair, skin, teeth, toes—
there wasn't a detail
left untouched. God liked his work.

And some of the men were happy. They gloried
in their bodies the way God wanted them to.
But there was a longing in most the way the first man,
the image of himself longed.

The men stopped to see where He was looking.

Fruit went uneaten: A bee's wing froze in flight.
Finally He understood.

He stared back at the annular nipples of His creation
and wept. He pulled them out of his chest
until they dripped with milk. He inverted the penis,
created a cavity inside because He couldn't do this
work anymore.

he likes to press against her

like wax paper over flowers
in some heavy
forgotten dictionary
full of must

occasionally the weight
the pressure
straightens her out
until she closes her eyes
sees color and motion

and vibrations from her lips
change this pattern into
little sexscape paintings

they are not framed and gilded
but protean and sweaty
she can almost taste the copper
from the red on their lips

what do other women
think about and
who taught them to stay
while steam-irons push over them
making them into pie crusts or
pliable dough for rolling pins

how do they inflate again
or recognize themselves in the mirror
how do they remember to sweat or smile or breathe
while flattening

Perspective

From knee to thigh I feel his presence.
He is not in my room but hangs at the base of follicles
resenting the impermeable nature of skin.

This mother's body has already given.
Fading and weighed down like fruit after frost
he sees what I look like through ice.

Patterns of lace, Dear.
A beauty.

80s Nostalgia

"I might like you better/ if we slept together"
--Romeo Void

I heard the refrain:
Never say never
and the memory hit me
like a mirror shard

pieces of me lying on the ground
        the sting
looking at myself
in his face
divided

his orange stripes
        below a moonless gaze
        blistery eyes
        the floor made of arms and legs

and I can hear Romeo Void
through the dark
this joke
this truth
this old innocence.

Chores

Sometimes he spreads her legs
like pulling pants from the dryer
hot and unwrinkled
easy.

It's not like she has forgotten the passion
just puts it off
the work grows like desire used to—
there is so much to be ironed.

The kids have used their juice box straws
to suck out their parents' energy.
The orange no longer holds the mystery of
l'orange
but of peels and vitamin C

white bits stuck under a fingernail
remind the senses
how exquisite they used to be.

Odes to Shirtless Joggers (parts I, II, & III)

I.

I see you from my dashboard
your skin slick as lemon meringue pie
or at least I think that's how you'd taste
if I could drag you in right now.

There is now way you can see me,
my tinted windows keep too much hidden
but I appreciate you taking your shirt off
Goddamn
we all do—
women, men, and coyotes who smell your salt
feel the saliva drip drip drip
down to the pavement and evaporate
in this dead cement heat.

II

I can see the muscles
under your skin
under the ginger trail
that winds down your stomach
in a sweat line
to the tightest shorts in Knox County
above braided calves that
sigh
with yeast and heat.

I knead them.

III

If I stop the car, sweet jogger, will you come inside?

I'd like to chew you down to the muscle,
        smooth you over with my teeth
discover tendon and sinew and bone

until I forget
        I'm in a minivan
        in a city
        with no sidewalks.

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