

**My Splendor is Temporary:
Poems**

by

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INTRODUCTION

I have never been able to detach politics from identity. In a country where opportunity is based on identity, where oppression has always been based on one's body, where individualism, or the emphasis of self, has been prioritized and has only encouraged the exploitation of the collective consciousness—I could especially not separate the self from the political within the themes of this poetry collection. I also could not separate the self from the collective, despite our culture's best efforts, and felt urgency in observing the linkage between the individuals that make up the collective parts of a body, and the then created, greater aggregation.

In observing and studying the many modern and contemporary women poets who largely influenced my own body of work, it was curious to me how some, like Elizabeth Bishop, famously attempted to separate identity, or confession, from their creative work. Bishop often denounced confessionalism as a form of poetry for its apparent grumbling and its obvious continuation of America's emphasis on the self. Described in *The New Yorker* by Claudia Roth Pierpont: "Bishop, who complained of the 'egocentricity' of a confessional poet like [Anne] Sexton, found deliverance in gazing steadily outward. Her later poems are filled with a quiet, tentative gratitude...hushed in wonder at the things that save them from themselves." ("Bishop's Art"). Whereas some female poets, like Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath, found freedom in their declaration and articulation of struggle, Bishop wanted to ignore it—hoping that separation would bring promise or healing. In my own work, I see the value of intertwining both—enunciating my own struggles I have faced in my life, similar to the struggles of Sexton, Plath, and even Bishop, while at the same time correlating those struggles to what is prevalent beyond my own experiences. Introspection and external

observation are the culmination of the political themes that exist within the poems of *My Splendor is Temporary*, arriving somewhere between confessionalism and creative political theory.

In her essay “Poetry is Not a Luxury” Audre Lorde emphasizes the importance of utilizing poetry as a creative tool of rebellion. She creates a harsh dichotomy between previously defined intellectualism, defined and created by Western, white, and masculine cultural norms—to the act of poetry, or creative expressionism. Lorde writes, “The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.” (282). She personifies the creativity that is brewing within each of us as a Black woman—a woman who through her intersectional identities, has faced multiple oppressive forces and institutions within her life. Lorde is unable to separate the political from her identity in both her essays and her poems, focusing on the injustices that Black Americans have faced throughout this country’s history, often evoking authentically violent imagery, and emphasizing art as a fuel for both healing and protest.

I find Lorde’s inclination towards politicizing her personal work as an utmost necessity, properly representative of how America’s political forces infiltrated every aspect of her life. When such overwhelming agencies exist in one’s life, there is not much room for anything else—a reality that slightly more privileged poets, such as Bishop, were not accustomed to. While experiencing her own losses and struggles, Bishop was allowed the capacity to grow within her life—from literal geographic travel to prosperous career expansion despite her gender at the time, Bishop and other writers like her have the capacity for focusing on the external when the internal is slightly more protected. Being a

white woman myself, I am aware of how this system has both harmed me and protected me—I have experienced gendered violence that I articulate in these poems, while also acknowledging my own privilege in my capacity to potentially grow beyond these experiences. Despite this, I still find myself more like Lorde in my emphasis of exploring both these disadvantages and privileges within my work. Nothing has felt more vital than studying our current political climate and its reverberating influences – a climate not too different from the time of Lorde, or Bishop, or Plath – and for me to reflect on it within my writing. My intent here is to not compare the experiences of these celebrated and influential women, rather to dissect the intention that exists within the bodies of their creative work, and the external forces that were at play in potentially making these decisions—once again noting on my own inability to separate the individual from the collective.

Lorde further emphasizes in her essay: “For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.” (281). Here she is detailing how poetry can be used not only as that tool of rebellion, but how it is the essential “magic” towards healing. Formulating one’s own experiences into language and eventual action are how revolutions are born—bringing the experience of the individual to the shared experiences of the collective. The art of poetry has always offered community and expressed grievance, serving as a window into the poet’s past and present. While the speaker in poems certainly do not always directly reflect

the poet themselves, there are still direct influences from experience and opinions that come to formulate this written art.

My collection of poems is bookended by two poems focusing on the direct themes of Americanism – social culture, Capitalism, consumerism, and individualism – the first poem, “The Avoidance of Atonement” taking a more universal look into these themes, while the final poem, “Atonement for Breakfast” is spoken from a smaller scaled, individual perspective. From the formation of this collection, I knew I wanted to have the beginning and ending poems to be two parts, or at least in direct conversation with one another. “The Avoidance of Atonement” is a rigid sestina, intentionally boasting in its formality and resemblance of cultured establishment. The opening stanza directly unfolds many concepts I further explore in later poems:

We are plagued by value—
the insistence of counting what is best for us.
I am not surprised by the overt
selfishness or the perfect
excuse to berate our body—
it is far from over. (1-6)

In the unprecedented time that has been occurring during my creation of these poems, a colossal pandemic uprooting the world’s sense of safety and normalcy, my particular use of the word “plagued” is deliberate here—noting on how consumerism and maintaining the flawed status-quo have permeated this peculiar time. Our culture has normalized valuing the economy, individual impulse, and prioritizing work over health instead of focusing on basic morality. Yes, this pandemic has shown Americans and the world many things—but

above all, it has shown us how established and concrete the institutions and influences within our culture truly are, through the many lives that were unjustly lost due to selfishness and greed.

An example of this is established in “Atonement for Breakfast,” where I paint the scene of an innocent person shopping for groceries only to be shot at and harmed while they are in the cereal aisle. This poem was directly inspired by the multiple shootings that have occurred in America as life is slowly starting to creep back to normal from this pandemic—from nail salons to grocery stores, America’s infamously problematic relationship with guns was not lost during this time of shared grieving, and neither was its apparent inability to do anything about this unnecessary violence. This poem is consciously in the present tense, emphasizing the importance of being in that moment from when life suddenly erupts from monotony to savagery. The description of this occurrence is subtle, where I attempted to focus on sensory cues rather than outright saying the words bullet or gun:

I jump to an intrusion of what sounds
like a crack shattering air,
nimble and unwelcome,
the cereal box drops from my hand
onto the bleak, industrial concrete which reminds us
that in America, there is no comfort. (16-21)

While this final line might feel a little too outright, it felt necessary to emphasize—in a culture that promises lavishness and success based on one’s own abilities, it is important to remind the reader that this is a fabrication told by a profitable system. In a culture riddled

by gun violence in almost every public setting, comfort and success are promised to no one. While these might seem like bleak tones to begin and end this collection on, they more accurately feel like realistic reflections, ones that many Americans attempt to blissfully ignore.

The standalone poem in this collection occurring at its center, “Baggage for Belonging” is the poem most directly about my own life, and how it relates to larger gender themes within our society. It explores the generational trauma that exists within my family, where my mother’s sister was murdered at a young age, and the echoing effects this trauma has had on my family since. This poem also connects this to my own personal traumas, and considers how a life spent in attempted warning still offers no chance of safety for many women:

I walked through the gravel, the grass,
and the leaves, feeling the house’s attempts to pull me
back to its certainty with the goosebumps on my neck
and my hair’s strands swarming like a storm around me.

The Samsonite swung against my bare leg
as I walked into the forest,
a traveler with her luggage into the awakening—

the darkness moved with a force of direction around me. (105-112).

These lines denote a particular shift in this poem—where the speaker is not only changing setting from the familiar walls of a home that desperately attempts to pull her back into safety, but the speaker is choosing to no longer ignore her fears, to instead directly confront them despite the foreboding eventuality that might bring. In terms of

contemporary poems written with feminist themes, this poem admittedly has a more demoralizing tone than most, emphasizing the non-linear road towards existence and recovery. It felt obvious to me that this poem demanded to stand on its own, not only in its particular length, but in acting as a thematic climax of this collection with its images and tone—this poem felt to me like one that would hang over the rest of the collection in its authenticity.

My Splendor is Temporary is a collection that naturally poured out of me during a time of collected and personal unrest, serving as a creative and emotional grounding through questioning all that surrounds us and lives within us. Through its title and interwoven themes, my urgency is prominent in its warning—we should be more than how they try to qualify us.

The Avoidance of Atonement

We are plagued by value—
the insistence of counting what is best for us.
I am not surprised by the overt
selfishness or the perfect
excuse to berate our body—
it is far from over.

I have learned patience over
my insistence on finding value
within my flawed body—
my body, here to consume us
with its nothing that is perfect,
with its flaws so painfully overt.

We are not opposed to the overt
possibility that America is over.
America is perfect,
America gave value
to the guise of the us.
America created a body—

a hungry, aching body,
that feeds on the overt
struggle between us.
Our compassion is over—
we no longer find value
in the façade of the perfect.

The flaws of the perfect
state push our ragged bodies
until they are dry of value,
crumbling and overcome by the overt
necessity of crawling over
the identities that separate us.

I wish I could believe in us—
but in America, perfection
is achieved by reaching over
the us. My individual body
will conquer your overtly
weak one. I have stolen your value.

I manipulated us, America. I manipulated your body.

Is your perfect image of justice now overtly
tarnished? Or is it over—are you drained of value?

My Splendor is Temporary

If I killed myself
I think my name
would get lost
in a whisper.

Me, and the woman
inside of me,
the one who controls
my hands and the words
that escape me.

I sit with her
in the shower,
bare ass against
top rim of the tub—

the room only lit
by candles,
my vision clouding
into darkened unfocused,
the shower's silver handles
getting lost

into the shadows
as I feel

every bit of myself
disappearing.
I don't think many
would repeat my name
after I am lost,

and I'm reminded of
The Double Death—

where one leaves
the physical
and then eventually
leaves the minds
and the words.
I don't think I've left
much impact—

I sit with that.
I allow it to stir
and harden.

On a summer afternoon
in the house
on the corner,
my parents in the backyard
pulling some weeds
and trimming the garden—

inside I
saw my mom collapse
through the glass,
fade into the grass,
body petrified and stiffened—

a swarm of wasps
found and dared
to sting her,
ripples of yellow hovering
with a dissolving hum,
sharp venom into
burnt ivory, protected
by sweat and irritation.

I ran outside to save her,
scratched and smeared
grass stains on my
trembling knees—
but my hands
and my words
offered no potential.
Petals of lavender
dangled from her,
herbal and appetizing—

she told me not to suck
on the brute's juices,
sour malice entwined
with pulsing torment—

but I was tempted
by the poison,
and felt hopeful
by the promised sting

of being remembered.

October 26th

One entwined autumn eve,

I never asked for your attention
but my eyes
had wandered
for years
in anticipation.

As the spirit of Halloween
distracted everyone else
with its vicious glitter
and excited rooms
with radiance sweeping from
purple, to red, to green

we stood in the warmly
lit kitchen, devoid of artificial
coloring or ghostly
vigor. Slightly dim,
but inviting—

my scattered curls partially
wet between the sweat
and various questionable drinks,
stuck to my shining skin
and to my black velvet dress,
your own, tousled
from my bold brush
where I caressed your hair,
your cheek, your chin,
to the collar of your shirt
that was open, and gaping,
unbuttoned from the evening—

the music of the mass
and their wicked dance,
faded and controlled
in the far away rooms,

between us,
the air sucked
into silence, keeping

us alone together. I had never
 been so thankful
for the absence of time.
 We stood there—
 hand finding hand
 eyes inspecting eyes
 bodies in full form,
enamored by the silence
 and the stir all around us.
I stared into you, your green eyes,
 (confused by your admiration)
 willingly, unwaveringly, for the first time—
 the music's bass in my lungs,
 shaking my breath, my honest heed,
your beating fingertips dared
 to pull me in—

 so I could further see
 the crease of your usual brow,
lightened,
 your usual focus,
ignited,
 I whispered my woeful waiting,
 I grabbed hold of
your hand
 (trembling, electric)
 and your needing,

 frozen in time
I still feel stirred
 from my exhilarated lips,
to the care of your attention.

I Want an Empire in My Teeth

after Morgan Parker

Visceral—
how meat falls
from bone. How
flesh separates
like a zipper down
the back, exposed

and clean all
at once. He murders
me with his eyes. I
chomp, vengeful,
as life clings
to my gums,

perfectly pink
an empire sucked
fully—its
shadows, grime,
and bone
stick to my
broken and punctured

teeth. I cling to life
with them. My tongue
rounds and forms
to their aching backs
as I try to release
this taut tension—

I feel your loss,
it swishes in my mouth.
My pinched lips glued
refusing to release
the many myths
the taste, the truth—

And I swallow them
 ready to forgive you
 as juice slips
 from the corner's edge.

I sat under the umbrella's hue

in the primal discovery
of breath escaping humid chance
while

at the corner of the pool
with arms marvelously draped against the brim
you sat and stared—

summer cool against perfect blue,
eyes with suggestion
a sip of your perspiring drink—
the taste of syrup cane
and distilled grain

—the ice grazed your lips
fresh drops fell past each corner
you wiped them away—

a careless effort on water's edge
skin against saturated concrete
the water's ripples against your chest

Then you picked up my shades
circled shadows found
leisurely shook your short hair

and slid them up your nose

Your body half obscured
I couldn't help but move

and as I approached
I could better see your lashes
past the metal's edge
curve against curve
fragile force against fringe

your voice guided my body
an orchestrating murmur
fingers flitting the water
they could trace each step

water trickling onto itself
the hum of a bee sucking
honeysuckle nectar

in the near branches

a waft of pure fragrance

I could feel your inviting

hands submerged

hiding what's beneath

with the sun against my neck

lathered with anticipation

the sweetness of running sunscreen

cocoa mixed with moving chlorine

I could only stutter

through sun chapped lips

and the haze of the summer's afternoon

—I just had to be close

The Favorite of the 4th

The devil's eggs
laid delicately on Susie's platter.
Positioned methodically
with the twisted swirl of a swirl of
glistening yellow mustard.

We won't talk of the condiment.

The children avoided
the chastised appetizer—
refusing to make
the putrid scent palpable,
they knew the inevitable,
wretched aftertaste to follow
was foreshadowing

to the brutal main course.

There's a mustard stain on the gingham—
yellow seed on waves of white weaving red
—and it won't rub off.

eyes on red

I wore my red lipstick
for you.

You asked me not to
titillate your weakness
or indulge you.

I promised to behave—
to wear anything
that would not expose
our secret.

That very evening, I sauntered
through the room
serene as a panther
my shoulders smooth
with my hips.

I felt your eyes on me,
an energy that clung
and formed around me.

The thrill only continued—

in compulsion I danced
all around you,
pointlessly mingling,
working my way to—

I finally met your eyes
your eyes with such vigor,
their craving fell
to my lips

to my shaded red
daring and exposed
your face grew intense
shadowed but intrigued,
I kissed a trail down your neck
a trail of passion smeared red,

in deliberation
your thumb traced my bottom lip,

exposed red affection—

I swam.

I swam with your voice.

You whispered your need,
my need with intention.

What kept us waiting?

The thrill overwhelming.

Afternoon Snack

I am trying not to hate
myself while I eat this grilled cheese—

to not feel submerged by the idea
that it should represent comfort
rather than disgust.

It is not cheap American
or its gooey yellow center.
The bread is sizzled crisp
and formidable against all
that begs to seep out.

I am not a blanket to keep you warm.

The smooth and the coarse cut
through my body's entirety,
from my earnest mouth
all the way down my throat.

I watch the arms on the days move
and count them by the grilled cheeses
I never eat but hunger for.

Perhaps in another life
where I am more tolerant
of what pretends to be worthwhile.

My body

is forced
into starvation.

I have tried
to purge myself
from within—

to finally release
all that screams
in my stomach
for more than
this acidity
all that aches
from the quivered
whimper of hungering
for more, more, more
all that burdens
myself from my
core, weighing

me down from
my center
until my feet
no longer function
are no longer
able to take
step after step
unable to carry
this body from
regular struggle
or normal function.

I have tried
to purge myself

but my body—
with its iron wall
and pluck that sticks
to my spine
and my soul

I am unable to release
and it all remains internal

withering from the silence,
suffocating
as it begs and begs at

the back of my throat—
burns with my words
and I don't even receive
the satisfaction
of beauty, or purpose,
or progress
for the sake of it all.

But I still
will try to
purge myself
despite forced
starvation
and preserved
trepidation
for the miserable hope
of continuation—

Step into a hospital waiting room

during a pandemic and one would think
they'd be met with pandemonium—

nurses on the ground lifting up patients
who could no longer lift themselves,
security berating anyone to leave
who did not absolutely have to be there,
alarms blaring somewhere in the distance
to notify that in this very building
there was something to be afraid of.

None of this was my experience.

We sat in the non-respiratory symptom
section where the few
others in malaise also waited
with their half covered faces,
blanketed in protection.
Periwinkle cushioned chairs
with snake plants growing from their tops
like helmets of lawless gloom.
There's a vacuum yelling in my ear.
A mechanic fixing a lightbulb
while the waiting room dwelled in an otherwise
undisturbed silence.

The cleansed silence was only broken as
she stuttered sentences. I couldn't seem to answer her.
Her words were jumbled and
veered off into new directions
as she carefully crafted a lie to tell the nurses.
She cried in exposed waiting
before the mechanic could fix the lightbulb.

Finally, after what felt like
perpetual despair,
she was offered refuge.
She composed herself as the nurse approached—

only, for precaution, no visitors.

Ghost Song

after Emily Dickinson

—I am Emily reincarnated.
I dwell in

Possibility, better at a distance
than up close—

I take her hand,
so serene and solemn.
There is no chance for us—

the plaster has dripped
and stained the hardwood,
but through the long night
I hear whispers of hope—

I won't see your ghost—
floating and hollow
against the floral curtains.
Memorialized eighties blue
painted with petals of pink—
I want you to tread

the Earth
with me—

You are more than
imitated versions of myself—
Bruised peach cheeks
laying on the rug
in front of the fireplace,

I can hear all of them—

shattered
indignant
and close—

I drown them
as I lose my head in the carpet.

The fire's embers
turn to ash as I wait the night

for your vanished song.
The ash finds my throat—
I try to rasp verse
but it deceives me.

Belonging to this plane
my neck weighed horizontal
your smothered words

so dangerous
yet enduring—

We have been here for a year and I don't seem to recognize myself

I am craven and sixty-years-old.
Crusted into my bathrobe with pink slippers
bound to my feet, though barely hanging on—
lazily, they can sometimes dangle off,
teetering on my toes
while I'm indifferent to
their stretch from slumber to delirium.
I am too busy scuttling around,
pacing in my confinement
of just over 300 square feet—
permeated with hollow, hanging walls,
these arching ceilings offer no
chance of release.
I lose shape beneath them,
crumbling from their entrapment
as I satisfy my need to find purpose
between the too-long-since washed sheets
and endless coffee tastes. I am fragile,
segmented, splintered, and frozen—
who are you to withdraw
from this preservation? For
I too fear her candor—
though I am not alone.
I can feel them in their neighboring caves,
they too exist in steady silence.
I feel their television screens screaming
on their bodied walls, reverberating
with the warmth of continuation.
A suffocating tedium, swirling and warm,
I have chosen this safety.
I have needed her silence.
My restlessness is stirring, overcoming—
and yet I am nesting in it.

Baggage for Belonging

In her old bedroom there was a baby blue Samsonite train case
with silver latches that snapped in the front
and a rigid handle on the top
barely strong enough to carry its own contents.
Upon opening there was a white plastic tray
divided into equal squares, holding
what we deemed most fitting. There were
assorted belongings, I don't remember them.
What I remember was below,
a ragged doll whose fabric skin was faded with age
and clothes that hung like
they had been torn off. Her hair unkept
with edges that were ferocious and uncombed,
I wondered at the age of seven
how long she had been kept
in this coffin. She wasn't wearing
any shoes, and below her
there were items of remembrance
that laid like leaves and branches,
overwhelming one another in aching.

A bedroom turned office,
with copious stacks of dated newspapers
and a cheap desk overflowing
with unimportant letters. The room's many windows
faced the front yard, tucked below
the overhanging forest's branches,
suspended like curious strangers
intrigued by the guise of hinting chances.

The day I became a woman I felt ashamed
of what was between my legs and within me.
As if someone had reached into me,
dug their nails into my body's frame
and dragged with intention until I bled
for days while considering my own delicacy.
I was reminded of those days
between newspaper stacks that screamed
their obsolete headlines while I looked
straight at the past without even knowing her.
The house's frame was a contained grave
with life that stirred gently,
too afraid to take a chance

to leave the dust filled air that
sucked the life with urgency.
In here decisions were silenced,
time stood still in front of the
small television blaring on the kitchen's counter
while butter sat on the table
sweating from the heat of
the summer. South of the house
there was a plot of dried corn,
so the deer could steer from the shadows
of the forest's haunting gaze.
I stood, watching them feeding
on the opportune guidance from
the darkened living room, only lit
by the bit of sun left
crossing down the mountain
into evening while I held
the indestructible Samsonite train case
in the sweating palm of my right hand.

I walked to the kitchen to find my voice.
There were bead curtains hanging
in the window above the sink,
jaded green onto orange repeated,
and the television's voices still sacred—
it reeked of cigarette smoke and sweet strawberries.
Cups of milk on the brown linoleum,
forgotten pots left on the stove,
magnets for everything American engulfed the refrigerator.

The second day I became a woman
was just as gaping. Burnt voice
against dry throat incapable of instrument,
I will in perpetuity remain at the place
within the dirt, looking up to the night's sky
hoping for an ending. I do not need
your protection or your saving. Yet
I remain there, bound to my womanhood,
with its seeds of unforgiving
despite a childhood spent in warning.
In the haze of the kitchen lit
from a past day I could see my grandmother
sitting at the kitchen table,
smoking a cigarette in hidden solitude
with her lofty, perfect perm
and oversized spectacles in the tint

of slight orange. I reached to touch her,
but my fingers went through
her form in an airy silence that did not disturb
or confront her. She called out a name
that mirrored her own, lost but still dangling
its fingertips onto reality—
I heard a voice from
the office bedroom, down the hall
past her aging school portraits and into her former room.
The closet slightly askew, I thought
I saw her body hanging in line with her unworn dresses
and above her polished shoes, hung in
perpetual silence—I thought I saw myself
hanging in there too.

The front door's screen screeched slowly
behind me. Almost night
on top of the mountain
with no streetlamps or sidewalks
or any other assurance of civility.
I walked through the gravel, the grass,
and the leaves, feeling the house's attempts to pull me
back to its certainty with the goosebumps on my neck
and my hair's strands swarming like a storm around me.
The Samsonite swung against my bare leg
as I walked into the forest,
a traveler with her luggage into the awakening—
the darkness moved with a force of direction around me.

I did not know where her body was.
I only felt her with my heart, aching in every beat
with a familiarity. I reached a point in the forest
where the trunks flaunted stout to the Earth
and their roots ran wild above the ground.
There was no wildlife here, but a fawn
that must have followed me from the corn plot
in curiosity, separated from her mother,
echoed against the enriched ground behind me.
I found the tree,
and sat the Samsonite against the roundest of trunks
with knots that curved in a solid frustration.
Its blue shade held cold in the forest's glow,
any natural light, now deceased.
I snapped and exposed
a mirror on the lid's inside, as it sat against silk
elegantly stitched and layered,

as screams of warning
in my grandmother's voice
erupted from the case's contents,

I towered over her—
she wore a golden anklet that glimmered for identity,
her skin faded with age from residing
for decades beneath the woodland's care.
Her hair just as mangled and her body exposed—
she laid there, unprotected, body violated—
lifeless.

I spent a lifetime in hopeful protection.
Yet I laid down beside her,
two bodies in ruin—
I ran my fingers through the dirt
and grabbed hold of her cold hand—
solid and formed, blood crusted on her fingertips
from years of holding onto her wounds.
The Samsonite's mirror just beyond my sight
where a man in waiting emerged from the forest.
The fawn jolted away in distress
while I submitted in silence.
She closed my eyes, and I gave in.

II

Strong Taste

These men are made of salt.
I taste them—their glistening skin,
protruding jaws that jut
like a knife

but fall with a whimper.
They are all talk—
their words smell of liquor
that only trip rather
than define.

They sweat profusely
but never show it.
I can smell it sucked in beneath
their polyester blends,
congealing while unaware

of their own decaying.
They think this brine
will save them—a taste
we must desire.

I have never been one
to prefer superfluity. But still—
when I lick their skin
while they are still unaware,

I can taste their bodies spoiling.
They have been rotting
for some time. Let us
not mourn those soon to perish—

with the sea in their flesh
that corrodes life from the living,
they were always tainted.

Their wants are sticky, coarse,
and their effect all the same—
interrupted, yet unrelenting.

The Politics of Volume

I have suffocated
myself in desperate
attempt to follow
my allocated parameters.

Prospering requires room—
room is a privilege
only given out to those
who needn't beg for more.

I stand here begging
as my skin stretches thin
like a veil down the alter,
like the casing of a sausage,

ready to rip and barely
veiling the anguish
boiling underneath.
Yet it properly seals my lips

and the cries they choose
to whisper. These cries
weep for acceptance, the plea
of a promise for space.

Space will not be granted.
I will die in my containing,
fighting from within, from a loss
of oxygen or the will to forgive.

dream of a never day

As my body lays in the prickles
of the grass I can feel
the heat from the sun radiate
against my figure—

ignited and enflamed,
starkly white with blotches
of red warmth, sun kissed
in saturation, a small smile
attempting to show in

my expression. I run my hands
above my head and feel the
ground's blades, tracing my fingers
with them, from clustered soil to
sharpened edge—

my senses are overturned
to your own fingers tracing
up my curved leg. Gnats
swirl around my mind,
bouncing against the air's affection
in a dizzying daze. The light
is bright but you do not
hide your temptation.

You slide up my summer dress,
resolved in wanting
more of my summer stained
skin. I whisper your
name to the air and the insects
that surround me,

allowing them to feel the
weight my voice carries for you.
You kiss the honey off
my exposed inner thigh
while I'm enthralled
by the risk of—

Phoebe Waller-Bridge Taught Me that a Priest Could Be Hot

Like her own
extension of self
I find myself
uninterested with religion.

The audacity,
hypocrisy,
total oppression
and expulsion aside—

I am not tempted
by the ornate stained
glass or the promise
of a heightened existence.

I do not need any
further shame of
my sins, nor the necessary
personal confession.

I will not be forced
to a fixed moral compass,
otherwise unfound without
their enlightenment.

But when her other self—
her public face contrived
of strength and capability
gets lost in the thought

of a surprise, a priest,
a man from the uncharted
side—I know and understand
her fascination, her temptation.

Against his own principles
he is also drawn into this
dizzying, pulling, captivating
love from lust when he says:

*Oh, fuck you for calling me Father,
like it doesn't turn you on
just to say it.*

Well excuse me, Father,
for I am not a fool
from forbidden love
despite my nontheism.

I do not need your god
to educate me in
how it feels to
stroke a spark

one cannot find
themselves forgetting.
In fact, Father,
it is I who needs

to educate you, for
there is one facet
of intimacy
you seem foreign to—

It will, in fact, not pass.

The brush of that love
will remain within me,
within her, within you,
far longer than your god

could ever ruminate. If only
I could teach myself
to forget such tenderness
that only exists between

the chosen few, the rarity
of connections that one
cannot realize its significance
until it is lost or gone.

Perhaps this is what you feel
for your god. This intimacy
carefully placed that you
feel within every ounce

of your soul. I doubt it.
Such intimacy can only
be shared. It cannot pass.

It remains on your heart

like the burn from a
branding iron—making
fools of us all in hopes
to grab hold of it.

The Hedge

So many nights
we found ourselves tucked
beneath the moon's shade

after the long summer afternoons,
or even spring mornings,
captivated in its introduction.

In a back alley
down on whisper street,
lost in a fogged car

with its headlights
rumbling low, entrancing
the night's fog or

some other blanketed
convention. The space
between us here could disappear—

honesty existing within
those few, trivial inches.
In these scarce moments

that passed with the pace
of a spark to its long
desired flame, reality

melted away as the frost
of the passing months would crawl up
the windshield, reaching

for the warmth confined.
In these hours on the many nights
you grew from fresh elation

to eventual imploration. I don't
blame you for this progress.
Only the many breaths

I wasted, disguising myself
with excuses into the expansive
hedge that lingered next to

our place. Our place—
where I realized I loved you.
Where I grew in fear

to admit this while you
were always brave. I hid
in the branches, skin scratched

by its limbs that consumed
me, as I drained into
the darkness while you

finally drove away. In the
starkness of the now days this hedge
towers over me,

echoing my consequential silence.
Our moments now gone,
while the hedge still remains.

Busy is a sickness

They tempt you with promise.

Forty hours wasted days a week
into delirium, succumbed by the necessary
vices that drop us in a wading puddle,
somewhere between wanting and worn,
with Cheeto dust stuck to my fingers like
a production of that promise—
I can see it, fabricated and vibrant,
but much like the dust it crumbles
to the ground and into the grains of my
carpet. What was once prominent,
now swallowed and crushed but

I am more than their aligned pressures,
I assure myself, as I lose myself more
each day between the disappearing hours
and the youth I wasted chasing a dream—

Why I broke up with social media

The terror

of every day, the elongated misery
yet total transfixion of losing
moment after moment, slippery

slopes of promised splendor,
exchanges that don't satisfy and yet
we need more of this fabrication.

I do not recognize myself
or the person I am told to be
from these varying portraits

displaying wealth and certainty.
I do not find connection,
just torment and apprehension

from these platforms built
for our collective body. I will not
be a slave to your tracking

or aim to quantify my desired
reality. I am better than their ploy—
we are better than their reckoning.

With interface woven like intricate lace,
we salivate for its inclusion,
for satisfaction in a morbid place.

Walking home through the garden's gate
fluorescent light blinding my vision,
broadcasting my tumultuous fate—

I need to see it.

When I look

at a clock late at night
I know that somewhere
you are likely awake too.

I wonder what your evening looked like—
concentrated in the kitchen
between boiling pots
and tastes from spoons—

the after-dinner dishes soaking
in a warm bubble bath
fragranced by the lavender dish soap
that still arouses my nose and
forces me to think of you—

perhaps lying on the couch,
your dark room ignited
by the stoplight right outside.
Waves of red into green,

with hesitant yellow in-between
do you watch the shadows on your ceiling?
What do you see when you close your eyes?
Is it a moment of quiet reflection

that sweeps the night behind you?
Have you found yourself lost to the tension
between what we can control
and what we cannot—

how do you spend your restless nights?
I know it's arduous for you to slumber.
Do I ever cross your mind,
from living room to bedroom
only a few steps
with the toes that swept
from the stoplight that bleeds
to formidable, dulled illusion?

Have you had enough moments with
her
that she is all that occupies your mind?
Or do you still find the time

when all is still, you stretch for rest,
and you cannot fight the urge
to allow me to overcome you.

My lips no longer red,
faded from separation
I trace them to connect me
to your stalling drowse.

In the tentative nights
that curve like an avoidant
lover,
I am still lost with you
when all becomes silent
and I'm watching my own shadows
in my bedroom.

uggs are back in fashion like it's 2007

it's 9pm on a friday night
at your local middle
school gymnasium.

the giant ceiling is strung
with thick, papered ribbons
and dulled string lights,
casting a disappointing
radiance across the room.

rihanna's soft soprano glides
between the clustered crowds,
emphasizing the space that
widens between them.

I stand in the corner—
pulled to the wall in traditional
fashion. this shadowed angle
where the lights in
a circling cadence could
not reach, where
rihanna's voice only
swallowed the possibility
of interaction is where
I begrudgingly forced myself.

desire fighting shame—
my act of invisibility
in response to the need, feeding the part
of myself I did not then
know would continue to silence
my larger.

my larger self
that needs to be seen,
that feels dead
in the corners of these rooms.

the favored children
were probably off somewhere—
in some prestigious corner,
the middle of that room,
or not even in that gymnasium—

in someone's faraway basement
or their backyard that
smelled like the golf course nearby—

I don't pretend they ever
thought of me while I stood
in that gymnasium in the corner
of that room standing in
my chestnut ugg boots
as my attempts to fit in
only harmed me.

Eternity

There is death in loneliness.

I have felt the disturbing depth of death of loneliness.

I spend my other time in freedom
contemplating every action to ensure
that I will not again discover
that decrepit depth.

But here I find myself—
aching from heart to bone
deteriorating from flesh
to Mother Earth again. I have bled
for this avoidance. Still, it finds me
and kills me once again.

Atonement for Breakfast

I am standing in the aisle
where cereal finds Life
in the cardboard boxed weaves
of red, into yellow, then green—
I notice pancake mix
and advertised maple syrup.
I remember the specifically thick
pancakes my father made on Saturday mornings,
where each bite melted beneath
the mound of usually soft and messy butter.
Plated center of the small kitchen table,
with steam that rose and danced
to the tune of an endless weekend morning.
I did not need coffee, only the cranberry juice
that turned my tongue further pink—

I jump to an intrusion of what sounds
like a crack shattering air,
nimble and unwelcome,
the cereal box drops from my hand
onto the bleak, industrial concrete which reminds us
that in America, there is no comfort.
The box falls with no sound as there's
a ringing in my ear—

I fall with it, as crunchy grain
explodes like a catalyst with no surrender,
my body slaps the ground,
exposed beams spinning high above me,
the vibrance of devouring dizzying me with it.
I lay on the floor somewhere down
aisle 12, in the center of a crime
presenting as a cereal's wrongdoing.

As blood pulls from me,
I notice my body has been ruptured,
torn through, consumed, and abused—
I think again of my father's pancakes
on the bygone Saturday mornings
as the electric cracks now grow visceral
with the tumult of screams
that shock awake my hearing—

I am not at a movie theatre,
nail salon, high school, or church—
I came here for blueberries
and sweetener and something simple
for my own mornings,
but I lay in observance as life is lost
where it is trusted to remain simple,
with my mass of blood hair entwined
with the artificial oats

while no one does anything
but howl about autonomy
as milk seeps from their mouths
as they slurp for their savagery.
I am not sugar to be dissolved
or porcelain to be filled for your yearning—
my fingers tremble for
their right to life
as you have stolen my self
in aisle 12 at 11am
on a Monday morning.

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