

No Rest For The Heavy Eyed

by

Mary Lynne Biener

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Forward

If you have this collection in your possession, if I sent you a password, it means that you are very dear to me, no matter how often we hang out or how long we've known each other. Or at the very least, I adore you enough that I'm ok with you having a glimpse into the rusty cauldron of my soul and its pawn shop contents as expressed by my poetry.

Some of you may have read other things I've written, like blog posts, essays, some academic stuff I'd helped co-author that made a bit of a splash almost a decade ago. I even wrote a vulnerable yet practical essay about my personally liberating relationship with Lucifer and St. Cyprian that a few folks read. I wrote it under a pseudonym, as a guest post on the website of a popular and respected teacher of the occult arts. I only shared that piece with a very few specific people, for reasons that should be obvious.

My poetry is for what can't be told in prose, for the stories that refuse to cooperate with things like linear time and quotation marks, and most often for things that couldn't be told at all until I danced with some ghosts under a changing moon with the music up loud.

I can count on one hand the number of people I share my poems with.

It's hardly a secret, but in case you're new here, I'm not for everyone. I've given up trying to be, and to be truthful, it wasn't much of a choice: my whole fucking life imploded and so I am no longer willing or able to be the same worker, lover, partner, friend, or pet leftist that I used to be.

The Tower card I'd dreaded, the one that made my blood turn to ice in a reading, whether for myself or anyone else, came for me. It's that one of the Major Arcana of any standard tarot deck featuring a lightning struck citadel with people falling from the crumbling windows to the unyielding ground below. And it fucking freed me. Emerging from that rubble offered me the grace to consider that my creative life has NEVER gotten its due from me, once I called myself back home from a life that never really was mine. The one in that Tower.

I'm still not sure what a life largely freed from the untenable expectations of people I don't owe shit to looks or feels like. I'm starting to enjoy finding out.

And so this is a collection from the biggest, dirtiest, bloodiest, dehydrated-from-crying crossroads in my life so far. It's not a quirky ukulele-accompanied, live-laugh-love renewal of my buried-by-the-domestic "creative process" (and Christ on a bike, I'm so fucking pig sick of that phrase).

After a hellish two years, a whole subject unto itself, my separation agreement and settlement was finalized and registered with the court. I stopped puking almost every day, as I had for several years. I decided, finally, to walk away from my somewhat respectable career, my reputation as a mouthy maverick notwithstanding, of almost 15 years, and with that, the clinical community that I'd been part of, inasmuch as I'm ever a part of anything.

I can say I'm discovering, but really I'm just finally admitting, that I don't want to be a part of much of anything anymore, since being a cardboard cutout of myself is the price of admission and isn't worth it. And it never fucking was.

All of these major resolutions, these loose ends finally, mercifully tied off, happened within the space of a couple of weeks, after literal years of my life tasting like 31 flavours of shit, even long before the end of my marriage.

After the dust settled enough to be noticeable, I spent many weeks-turning-into-months in an irritable fog, despite being medicated to the tits, wandering around my messy house and fucking around in the garden if I could muster the gumption to go outside; free as a fucking bird, yet still bracing myself for some imminent crisis; my muscles never really let go at night, my nervous system was still on constant watch, no matter what iteration of remedy I took.

I had become agoraphobic, partly due to the previously constant threat of my lunch landing on someone's shoes, and I still am. I was stuck creatively and in every other way. My various outlets and mediums, not to mention the more mundane tasks that had been shamefully neglected, clamoured for my frozen attention, but nothing took. I had dozens of poems whirling around my head as if in a blender but I'll be damned if I could type out more than a word or two before any vision, beautiful, visceral, hideous, or otherwise, vanished.

And so I signed up for a lost wax casting class in my old neighbourhood and ended up losing myself (in a good way, not in a career or shitty boyfriend way) in designing, carving, filing, and sanding wax models of pendants and rings and then witnessing and participating in their transmutation into silver talismans. I have

come to include that as part of the larger project of making myself at home in a multimedia, multifaceted artistic vision that is mine alone.

I'd never carved a damn thing in my life, aside from whittling sticks with my Opa (who also taught me to braid and whistle and be a communist). As you'll learn from the poems, that sort of work, talisman-making being one example, is in my blood, and it feels like a gift of fate to have found a path to carry on an ancient tradition, oft compromised or unspoken but never broken by Church or Genocide.

I'd learned over the past year or so, as I've dipped my toe into the pool of stories and memories a couple times, that I simply cannot dive into those good depths unless I have long periods of uninterrupted time and space far away from people, including, unfortunately, my most beloveds. I require the grace to be a complete fuck up with no witnesses.

I used to joke that my creative process isn't conducive to any kind of respectable life, but it was a joke that hid a truth that once caused me deep and fear-stained shame.

I need to be the feral and nameless madwoman in the hills to do my work. I need the full of the the night, unperturbed by streetlights and humanity, stars bright, the lunar phase easy to glean without confirmation from that fucking app that never works up in these hills anyway.

I need to be unseeable from the road. I will not be subjected to alarms to rouse me at some arbitrary time, particularly to tend to someone else's problem. I absolutely cannot concern myself with being responsible for patients, or worried that I smell too much like cigarettes to be around children without being the subject of a complaint.

I need music. Movies and tv cannot hold my attention beyond a visceral desire to smash whatever device the talking is coming from. I need various substances at various inappropriate times, of varying degrees of social acceptability.

I even worked with the spirits differently during this time, a bit less formally, since all of this, every word, is an offering to them. They were my constant companions on my nightly vigils, and many of their whispers are carried in the poems.

I shared packs of rez cigarettes with my Nané (my maternal grandmother who passed 8 years before I was born) and I'd use her ancient ivory holder if I wasn't too high and worried that my slightly too narrow Canadian cigarette would fall out and burn my cedar cabin to the ground. We'd chain-smoke through the night as

she assured me that this is exactly where I'm to be in this life, my destiny, even as I'd exhaustedly dismissed myself as a hopeless train-wreck, too old, too broken, and too fucked to even consider a career change, let alone have the audacity to call myself an artist, a poet, a writer, a maker.

I'd left cigarettes out for her for decades on various altars, long before I'd realized the depth of our connection, and now I finally know why.

My dear wily Old Man and I had some good laughs and a few cries, and so many other spirits, living or dead, stayed for a time with me, some quietly sitting next to me, or at the table as I worked on the couch, some with lots to say, driving my fingers against the keyboard as dawn broke and my eyes blurred. Many packed into the cab of my truck and kept me company as I drove through the verdant hills of the Madawaska Valley in Renfrew County to pick up smokes, gas, and weed at Pikwakanagan, and some insisted on turning the music up to 11 so we could sing it loud. Some were just content to join me when I'd have my restless times and step outside just to inhale the sweet air and yammer away to the raspberry and blackberry and thimbleberry brambles by the well.

I walked the bush a couple times every day in the late afternoon and evening, often with my phone playing music in my backpack or back pocket and me singing along. Headphones won't do, because I need to hear my surroundings and I want the forest to know I'm not trying to sneak up on anyone. Sometimes I picked a couple berries to eat on the spot, careful to leave most of them for my comrades of the bush, and sometimes I just checked on the tender fruit and nut tree seedlings we planted in late spring.

My pockets are full of cool rocks whenever I return to the cabin. I am on the Boreal Shield, near old ruby, garnet, beryl, and rose quartz mines. Given my growing collection, I'm staring to wonder if this lookout hill I'm perched on is largely made of various moonstones and smoky quartz.

The works contained within were all birthed (and that's barely a metaphor), for the most part, during that one week of time out of time. I'd sketched out a couple sparsely worded ideas as a start, but the bulk of EVERYTHING was done in those wild, free, beautifully lonesome nights. I have, of course, edited since. A poem is never finished, only abandoned. Even this forward has been rejigged a few times.

I like to hope that there's something here for everyone, at least among my kind, my "everyone"; if you are reading this, I count you among them, or close enough to be a fellow traveller, some type of kin.

In addition to less racy (though some very heavy) material, there's a fuck of a lot of lust, longing, pining, and a variety of carnal acts described in evocative detail, all essential to several pieces. I humbly pray that I'm a good enough writer that you can read it and not be weirded out the next time we hang out, that certain flesh toned imagery, slick with sweat, doesn't drive you to distraction as I tell you about the new vegan place down the street.

In all seriousness, though, if you want to avoid smut of any particular sort, or any specific heavy subjects (ie genocide, awful childhood stuff, death), message me and I promise to do my best to help you navigate it. No judgement. Ever.

One final, if lengthy, note before I let you just read the damn thing: there are several poems that relate to a fellow I had relations with, though not exclusively, for the better part of June 2022. His name is Evan. Although I hadn't communicated with him since the end of that singular month, our brief but heated affair provoked a mystifying quickening within me that really made no sense until I started writing about it, and so those experiences have remained with me, even though most of the other men I had various flings with have disappeared into the mists of my ever-shittier memory.

And because my life is comprised mostly of magick and strangeness anymore, Evan sent me a friend request literally the day after I'd completed my first draft of this collection and my lover had read it in one sitting. And after a week and a bit of radio silence, we chatted on Messenger. He has graciously given me permission to use his name.

It may be worth noting here that this is art, not journalism, and the stories told herein are dependent on my recollections and when in doubt, a pinch of artistic license. I apologize in advance for any significant inaccuracies.

I found out on our first date that he'd done time for arson and was on parole. He's 11 years younger than I am. It was the most idiosyncratically intense, dizzyingly heartfelt, unnervingly unstable yet lushly irresistible sensual relationship I'd ever experienced by that time in my life, taking place in the borderlands of the parks that make up the geographical boundaries of the ruins of my once "normal" married life.

With him, there was an immediate easy and sweet intimacy that I'd never been able to open myself to before despite my 17 year marriage and my serial monogamy before that, and that aside from Sean, my lover and my person, there was no other man I had felt safer with in terms of consent and concern for my comfort, safety, and pleasure. And yet, there was an evasive and unspoken darkness between us

that made that intimacy a double edged sword that cut us both by the end of it, at least in my telling.

I'm still trying to decide if it was heartbreak, because that's mothers' milk to me, literally, and this was unfamiliar in a way that has baffled my heart for two years now.

I met Sean in person 10 days after the final time I spoke to Evan and writing all this stuff out has helped me make some sense of it finally. Maybe. It was that beautiful yet emotionally sanguinary affair that finally awoke in me the feelings that my body, heart, and soul require for a life worth living; anything less is unbearable and I don't have enough time left here to bother.

And yet, despite an intense connection that makes the blood rush faster and coaxes one to make playlists, that long lost feral part of me only shows herself for any length of time when someone is able to see and desire that part of me AND the less boner inducing parts, and still show up when others (not only lovers) didn't, couldn't, and still fucking don't. And Sean has always showed up, in a way never I'd experienced before, and I never even had to ask.

Sean and I have been building our visions, our love, our joy, our lives, eventually with our daughters and four-legged companions, since our first night the spent at the cabin when it felt like we'd always lived there, in the bush, together.

And yet, my heart is a strange, embarrassing, and capricious beast, and despite the hurtful, unexplained ending to my and Evan's time together, I hid, like a forbidden treasure, my intense, confused, paradoxically affectionate, hurt, smitten, angry, shame-inducing feelings, even from myself, as I look in the rearview mirror.

Evan haunted my writing, demanding that the stories be told so I could release him from the prison of all my questions. When I'd sit to write, I'd feel his presence standing in the doorway of other poems needing my heart's attention, and so I released myself in this telling, too.

I did finally learn what happened, why he went away. It wasn't what I thought. At all. And that will be, I suspect, another telling altogether.

Blessings of the Dark and Wild

Mary Lynne Armena Biener

Summer 2024

Dancing with Ghosts

I've always written
stuff down
since I figured out
that I could
form letters and
write something
mine

scraps here and there
folded, more often crumpled
shoved into paperback novels
and the backs of drawers
sometimes torn
in the chaos of my backpack

so many notebooks started
with one or two
errant
poems
and then a shameful balance
of blank pages

or the first paragraphs of a short story
and nothing else

I wrote lots of angsty shit about
actually-stupid boyfriends
but those were
usually one-offs

Pretty journals
with witchy feminist art
loose-leaf binders and lined paper
when I wanted to feel serious
during summers off
from York
hipster Moleskin ones
once I moved to the burbs
and went,

a shamefaced former downtown
indie bookstore fanatic,
to Indigo
at the mall
and similarly overpriced
plain-ass paper notebooks
that I thought might
elicit some seismic shift in me
where suddenly I'd be
prolific
and
brilliant
and have something worth saying
that someone would want to read

or at least humour me

I've never felt
legit enough
creative enough
visionary enough
interesting enough
never Manic Pixie Dream Girl enough
or angry cool punk enough
in high school
nor serious enough
later
with my whiskey soaked longing
for fools and assholes
almost always musicians
some artists
one who fancied himself a screenwriter
and I was always
the
fucking
girlfriend

I wrote tomes in university
and other times
during my endless
formal

education

Essays, though,

mostly and some

lit reviews

the usual deathly boring undergraduate

dross

that nobody fucking reads

once it's been graded

and barely then

So much wasted time

effort

paper

young blood

better spilled on

a more worthy

page

Even then, though

I was told

I was publishable

in front of the whole 4th year seminar

and it was the the most embarrassingly basic lit review

cobbled together from various dated journals and an ambitious but ultimately unread book or two

about the Nicaraguan feminist movement and their varied, issue dependent relations with the Sandinista government

read and graded by the founder of my “more rigorous than traditional majors so that the scholarship is taken seriously” program

and I didn't

fucking dare

believe her

Even better,

around the same time

the “bad girl of CanLit”

as she was known in the mid to late 90s

who taught in the

graduate creative writing program

bumped a smoke off me

outside Vanier college

while I was on break from a class called

Madness and Society
taught by a fantastic
professor emeritus
called Michael Quealey

she needed a light, too, as it turned out
she stood with me for a moment
both of us silent under a midday winter sun

She turned to face me more directly
“Are you a writer?” she asked me

“Sometimes?” I answered,
in abject horror
by my inability
to offer any kind of answer
that was worth opening
my yap for
my tongue suddenly dry
and stuck to my palate

“You look like a writer”
Deadpan.
She said it just like that.

I still can't think of
how one should
respond to that

“I teach in the grad program for Creative Writing
I want you to take my class.”

I'm sorry what
my inner voice
screamed
incredulously

“Ahhhh
I-I-I'm a Women's Studies major.
I mostly do stuff on political economy and
I don't even know

when I'll graduate,
honestly”
blushing
stammering
trying to convince her
that she must be
terribly
mistaken
fooled by my basement apartment
casual countenance
and smeared eyeliner from the night before

A couple years later
I actually did fill up
some notebooks
because it was the
only thing
that made any
damn use
of the fucking
heartbreak I was in

another stupid
boyfriend
dragging words out of me
in absentia
after I'd
been the dumbass supportive
girlfriend
spending years and
money earned doing relief shifts
at three different jobs
at shelters and crisis lines
and catered his boring
pedestrian
art opening
and
subsidized his
bullshit
like I was the
goddamn

Canada Council

but thankfully he barely
rated more than a
passing reference
once my inborn whorish ways
ravenously consumed my time
and attention
and I wrote way better shit

that fucking sparkled

Friends bought them for me
notebooks
for my birthday
Solstices
and would even listen intently
when I'd read some of
my poems
over the phone

I would stay up all night,

often after 8 hours of
listening to women cry
desperate for validation, a place to go, something, anything
on a helpline for any woman who had experienced any form of abuse at any time in their lives in the entire
Province of Ontario, in 53 languages, including several indigenous languages,

drinking whiskey
even though I hate the shit
smoking
everything
tears mixed with cheap ballpoint ink
and errant ashes
my face stuck to the open
page
sometimes
where I'd fallen asleep

But then, so fast it seemed dreamt

I got married
And had the baby I'd longed for
my whole life

And then I did major career switch, but the whole damn thing has sucked the life out of me since G was 18 months old and deserves no real mention here other than to say it happened, so here's a barely cursory summary:
tedious, less-than-rigorous education, toxic workplaces, dismissive and misogynist providers judging parents for sport and profit, and shit pay, and burnout

However

I wrote helpful and big-hearted blog posts
and
I was part of a research team that did a
first of its kind study that yielded a major
groundbreaking
academic paper
plus a couple more

I just got word that it will be
in an upcoming anthology
on trans health care
and have to update my bio

we were interviewed
for The Atlantic

But other than that
I only wrote infrequently
when it felt like
the words would explode
along with the rest of
me

Pages hidden
on my laptop's desktop
under innocuous
not obvious
file names
oddly

requiring passwords

Because it was only ever
when I was smitten
with someone
not my husband
that I'd write poems

although sometimes my
frustrations of being
a cardboard cut-out
of myself
would be a subject
if I ran out of lust
that day

my husband
honestly couldn't
give
half a rat's ass
to look on my laptop
for anything at all
if I paid him

there were a couple of them
men, I mean
both with the same initials
which made labeling astrological compatibility analyses
complicated

there were more than a couple poems
and zero fucking

poetry needs
fucking,
I have concluded,
to be any good
at least for what
I bother to write

longing,

without it,
only goes
so far

falls flat

by definition
it leaves one wanting
and I like
to satisfy
to be satisfied
at some point
anyway

I would often joke
that my writing
and the headspace
heart space
cunt space
drug space
chain smoking space
required
were absolutely
not conducive
to living a
respectable
life

And so
for a long time
mostly due to necessity
and dissociation
I chose work
that drained me down to nothing
because I thought that's all
I was good for
helping strangers
something that
made me
worthy
of the oxygen

I take up

I chose

in the laziest way possible because I couldn't be arsed

a marriage that

left me

wanting, desperately,

literally anything

resembling

the lies

we believe

about marriage

to make it worth

my while

and dwindling estrogen

I stayed busy

a lot of it wasn't a choice

but a lot was

I chose tired

burned out

respectable

dead inside

dry

untouched

a well

that was never

replenished

But I was

consistently

sought out for my skills

for the toughest patients

the most challenging and/or clueless students

for intelligently and compassionately addressing controversies

publicly and privately

I was really good at

it

I was
the most requested lactation consultant
at the busiest clinic in the GTA (when I was there, anyway; it's shit the bed since I left)
even as a student

I chose to live
as someone
I am not
really
no light and no shadow
and sometimes
I'd even write about that, too
and cry
and then go to bed,
next to my snoring husband
worried that staying up until 11
would make my next morning
a misery
worried that smoking a joint or
taking half an Ativan
would fuck me up
too much

And now
after a few years
of being beat down
by life
all those stupid necessary things
I chose over writing
are gone
all the things I clung to
thinking they were my life

that if I let go
if they were gone
I would surely die
or the
world would end

I didn't
It didn't

I have all the love
I could possibly wish for
more than I imagined possible
in this rotten world

I have
my daughter
my lover
my cat
my friends
my spirits
some family,
though
I've never really been sure
about most of them
truthfully

I know now
that to write
the way I do
I need to dance with
ghosts
with the music loud
and at least a couple full packs of
smokes
they don't show up for
tv shows

my ghosts, and others' ghosts too
and dancing with ghosts
requires a state of
being that is difficult to find (and being actually difficult to find is most helpful too)
living in consensus reality:
wide open heart and wide open senses
unafraid of the dark
ok with crying for days at a time
prepared for the resulting dehydration with a pack of electrolytes
willing to fall
painfully
foolishly
in love

with this world
despite its mortality and horror
a bit chemically altered in the head
and definitely unconcerned
with clocks
or schedules

for those ghosts to come
and gently kiss my
hand
in invitation

We twirl like Stevie Nicks
and some of the braver fellows dip me
gallantly
and we jig
and tango
we polka
and waltz
especially with my dad, who taught me to waltz before I could walk
we mosh
and shimmy
and shake a
tail feather

me and Tom Petty just nod our heads
in time to the music
or clap on the 2 and the 4
offering a knowing smile
and a twinkle in the eye
when
passing the joint

down down
into the deep
into the dirt
into the dark
into the silence
into the pain
so they can tell me
what they must

sometimes they tell
me theirs
and sometimes they tell me mine
whispers I carry back
in my purse
hidden in my smoke pack
as I once tucked my wedding ring
after crying for 3 months

and I can write them down
whenever I wish
these whispers
even on my hand in ballpoint ink
hell, I could tattoo them
and not hide them
in innocuously named
password protected
files
and I can wander to bed at
dawn
to rest
finally rest, my bones sinking into the Earth in surrender
when the ghosts
do

Summer Solstice

It's always been hard on me
for good or ill
fair or foul
the much beloved
Summer Solstice

I am
a dark end of February on
the shores
Lake Huron and
Georgian Bay
born during a storm
baby
on a waning, disseminating Scorpio
moon
constitutionally
averse to heat
contemptuous and suspicious
of the bright and sunny
and cheerful

It is
the relentlessness
the inescapability
the burning
that makes me dread it
and also I hate the heat
and how my body feels when out in it
and I especially hate
the assumption
that everyone loves
being with other people
outside
in that damp, smelly
misery

One of the first worst times in my life
as an adult anyway

carried over a few months
but
peaked
at the Solstice
the Sun shining
long and strong
all those extra hours of daylight yay!
down on the fucking
shameful
wreck of my life

I even had a second floor south facing window
that permitted the sun to burn and burn into my eyes
every damned sunrise
as if eyelids were a formality
and heated up my room
before it could even cool down from the night
in my
shitty ugly room next to the bathroom with a temperamental toilet that the landlord only fixed a year into the lease
in the shittiest house
on the shittiest block
of the shittiest street in the west end,
at least in the mid 90s
which were shitty in their own right

I shared that dump with 2 roommates and a boyfriend by the end
and my depression got so bad I had to leave
a public facing job in student government
and go on EI for sick benefits
so I got to be
on-the-record-crazy
and look for a fucking apartment

I will here refrain from calling my roommates shitty because I'm still friends with them
on Facebook
but my boyfriend was definitely shitty
I declined his friend request about a decade ago
smirkingly composing a
somehow gracious yet biting
rejection,
stoned and maudlin on Dilaudid

for my sciatica

and that fucking window
with no curtain, just a tall skinny shelf
with small but hopeful Home Depot tropical plants
purchased when I'd redecorated a couple months before
was the absolute shittiest of all

Old man take a look at my life
24 and there's so much more

I wasn't sure if it was a threat
or a promise
as much as I love
ol' Neil

And on the actual late evening and most of the night
of the Solstice
I went to a rave
by myself
as suggested by my weed dealer
who lived up the street
but made me go to her fucking
DJ gigs to get my shit
but she wasn't sure if she was going so
I picked up beforehand

and there I am,
fresh out of losing my job home friends and boyfriend in a week,
took a cab I couldn't afford there
because I didn't know where the fuck it was
with just weed
like a dumbass
to Cherry Beach
for manufactured music I didn't give a shit about
and can't sing along with
with people I didn't know
clad in a yellow sleeveless top I'd spontaneously purchased at
one of those stores with Tibetan and Central American clothes
and jewelry and incense
and paired it with a purple hippy skirt

because
colour hides me better than
the best
camouflage
those bent on killing
a being
can come up with

I didn't dance
none of that shit made my hips want to bust loose

I walked out to the end of the spit
alone and smoked a joint
and decided to look menacing
for shits and giggles
since I look that way anyway
when my jaw sets a certain way

The very best Solstice
though
was when my daughter was conceived
9 years later

I thought I felt a new flicker
in the aether
right after a romp
a night or two before

but on the day of the Solstice
I was doing yoga
or trying to
in the sunroom
of our apartment
and listening to the
Fifth Dimension
Age of Aquarius

my mom had the album
It was one of the only ways
I knew her

and so is a sacred hymnal to me

I can't recall if I had put it on intentionally
or if had just come on spontaneously

I remember inhaling, then exhaling long and deep,
down one on knee
unfurling my arms like wings
my heart splayed open to the sky
as the music
and longing
coursed through my blood
bloomed in my cells

LET THE SUU-UUUN SHINE

II-IN

(can't you hear the brass flourish right after?)

and
my whole being
filled with a light
familiar and not
at once
and it fucking worked
to my delighted
shock
when I pissed on a stick
a couple weeks later
on my Oma's birthday

After my daughter was born
I did a calculation to figure out
G's likely date of conception
And it was on the Solstice,
born,
as she was,
right between the two
due dates
we were given

She remains the best
of the Sun's
many

redemptions

one that solidifies a lifelong truce

Two years ago

I was at the height of practicing my long dormant

yet bred in the bone

inborn

whoredom

complemented with countless acts of park sex

with not many repeats in personnel

after my marriage

crashed and burned

and I had a June affair

with an arsonist

that lit me up

in all necessary ways

burned but

made alive

under the Solstice sun

to prepare me

for the love of my life

He is also a

redemption

wherever the fuck he is these days

he still shows up as a “people you may know”

on snapchat and facebook

though I bet he

thinks I hate him

but I couldn't hate him if

I tried

Last Solstice,

we were rushing to

prepare to flee

the home I raised my baby in

as soon as school let out

it took a month to plan

and execute

while my lawyer
aggressively
pithily,
via emails filled with subtle but devastating comments
about my husband's abject failure as a father
and generally derelict lifestyle,
he valiantly
(his name is Erroll, after all)
maneuvered to get my
rage filled silent
middle aged greasy smelling
passive aggressive
cupboard door slamming
intentional silverware dropping
don't pay for shit
gun nut
toddler fascist
asshole ex
out of my attic

The love of my life
met and fallen for the previous summer
gentle and smart and strong and solid
held me through all of it
like nobody ever had
and told me I was beautiful
and strong
capable
even when I could barely lift
my head
to puke

My daughter was so on board
ready
for all the shit to be done
and stayed with her beloved
Oncles Fabuleux
downtown

it became the summer she got

her “edge”
her friends say
and she grew into this
confident
kind
badass
in a band

But the Solstice was the ramp up
consistent with the relentless
long-ass sun
and oppressive heat
the acquisition of prescriptions
paying bills
in advance
and arranging
lawn care
acquiring decent coffee
and cases of oat milk
and a cat carrier
suitable for our beloved
sensitive Puff
because we needed something
at least as soft as her
that folded out

and she needed treats and toys
and maybe herbs to settle her
we couldn't leave her in the house
it was not safe
with him there
holed up with his rage
and guns

She jumped right into it,
the deluxe carrier,
as it sat open on the couch
when my love
gently encouraged her to
no running or hiding
and no bloody scratches down

any of our arms

I count many miracles
and try to feel deserving

This Solstice
passed me
in a haze
post-signed-separation-agreement

and a criminally ridiculous payout (which is still the best I could have possibly hoped for)
to a leech who I wish I could hate
but I can't hate someone whose DNA makes up half of my most beloved

and to add insult to injury I now apparently have to grieve
my whole son of a bitch life with him
tearing up as I do
when I find stupid shit
he forgot to take with him

post-lawyer-email-dread
as entertaining as they often were
hell, it's nice to have a chuckle while your blood turns to ice from panic
after seeing unfathomable numbers
but far nicer to not see them anymore

Tentatively relieved at the conclusion
of that particular
pile of shit
chapter in my life

I stopped puking
after years of
being on the verge
of my insides
threatening to spew
out
with no consideration for time, place,
or company
which had always peaked
in hot weather

as one could imagine

it literally resolved
almost overnight
thanks to my OB
a physical hell that dogged me
for years
that kept me fearful and tentative
and agoraphobic
resolved with a gel
applied to a thigh
each day

I decided to quit
taking care of everyone else
at least for pay
because let's be real
care is the most desperately needed but least paid
thing in this shitass world
and I'm not playing that fucking game anymore
I've done my time
and it was that, as implied
a prison
of my own guilty making

but mostly I quit because I can barely take care of myself
enough for my healing to take hold
in any meaningful way

I bailed on a profession I felt at constant odds with
I bailed on a clinic that is unfamiliar to me
in every way imaginable
anymore
and seems more like a retail complex
than a place of healing
for babies and children

I wore scrubs with my fucking name and credentials on them
even though they made me look boxy with my big tits and muscled shoulders
so the ever-changing reception staff
mostly young underpaid and unaccustomed and slightly shellshocked

women
wouldn't think I was some old madwoman
marching into the clinic with
all my bags
for no reason at all

I abandoned colleagues that never evolved
or took a fucking hint
year after motherfucking
nerve-rending year

I bailed on one
I thought was my friend
one of my closest even, at times
though he exploited me
and treated me like the
smartest one in the room
at the very same time
that he flattered my conscience
a shitty and suspect paradox I figured out
too late

but I kept my kin from there
two women who had been my students
and have become my sisters
and they are gold
another redemption
of the Solstice
who will carry on my legacy
of putting patients first

Most surprisingly,
I found art
and myself an artist
though I'd never imagined
myself to be one
ever

the idea was laughable to be honest
fucking absurd even

This past Solstice
I even discovered myself
as a granddaughter
yet an almost-crone
at once
myself
a necessary link
in a chain
a jump ring made from a helix of DNA
forged inside me
over a lifetime
softened and hardened again
and again
in fire and blood
to mend
that which had been
temporarily broken
by genocide
and smaller
tragedies

a legacy ancient and
so plainly a part of me
described and cited
in peer reviewed journal articles
even though disputed by the more
conservative elements
of Near Eastern Studies departments
and the churchgoing community

I read published academic papers
and watched recorded talks
from fucking Harvard
literally about people like me
not even that ancient
outsider artists
untrained

(according to the Church, mind: the selfsame Holy Executioners and Hoodlums who destroyed the Temple of Nané, Goddess of Motherhood, Wisdom, and War, and also the appellation of at least a portion of Anatolian Armenian grandmothers, and then drove her devotees to the Balkans)

and here,
these untrained priests doing priestly duties
Under the auspices of St. Cyprian
tending to people's troubles
body and spirit
talisman makers
and workers of wonders
Theurges and Thaumaturges
despised by the Church
and consulted in darkness
within the community
of which I have no part
and never will
which I think is better for everyone involved

but even still
it was hidden to me
a literal occultist
with decades of experience
and an obsession with research
practicing for years,
doing the St Cyprian novena every September,
and taking year long courses
with required daily workings
with people who shoulda known
about this particular aspect
as teachers and fellow travellers

hidden
literally occult
in plain sight in my daily practices
in the spirits I work with
I mean, I've worked with St. Cyprian for a decade
as the saint of witches and necromancers

I mean, he was from Antioch
less than a day's drive from
where my family came from

I mean, he's literally
integral to my spiritual life

like
one time I asked him to help
me when I sensed an unpleasant
presence in my room
late, as I was attempting to drift off
and he laughed and told me
to handle it myself
what was I doing all this for
if I couldn't manage that
little shade?

I mean, I started making jewelry
and everything I make
is Armenian
carved in wax and cast
in silver
my daughter's name
on a ring
in that ancient script

or ornately beaded
pendants
with little glass teardrop beads
that look like
pomegranate seeds

but talismans all
and in fact
I've made talismans
amulets
of various sorts
for a very long time

and yet the Good Saint's personal relevance to me
and mine
was undiscoverable except by
truths
whispered to me
by my Nané

literally shown to me

on my laptop, one otherwise solitary night
at the cabin in June
me and Nané watching
a Harvard professor
an Odar,
a non-Armenian,
like my dad,
even

Look at this! Are you seeing this?
I can almost feel her nudge me with her elbow
though I never sat with her on a couch

There you are, my dear lonesome girl
Can you see? Right there!
I hear her laugh
They told you I read coffee grounds
didn't they

How quaint
she says
with the sardonic look
we share
and every day
I see her face in mine
even more

we shared many a cigarette at the cabin
as I have with her
since I practiced even my earliest
baby witch
ancestor work
even though I never met her
in person
except when she was pregnant
with my mother

I was very very small
one egg
one cell
in my mother's nascent

ovary

I knew some stories
though I only recently really understood that she escaped the genocide as a baby
she came over at age one, maybe under
on a boat from Turkey
the eldest and only child
so far

many in my family fled over the months
when in March of that year an architect of the genocide
was installed as mayor
in the area my family lived
Sepastia
we and the Romans called it
but the Turks call it Sivas

and so as many as possible fled
my grandmother departed in November
there were many after too
there was a stop in France,
Marseilles maybe?
from Turkey, though there may have also been a departure from Syria
there were a couple of variations among the manifests
and I get them mixed up
who was on what boat
and in what month
of 1913

I put all that together myself
under the Solstice light
the story

around the dates of departure
what wonders on the internet
documents from ancestry
ship manifests being the most useful in this particular instance
and then I compared them to documented regional history
of the Medz Yeghern
The Great Crime
the long dormant academic in me

deep diving across seas and oceans
providing myself a context
that I never heard from family

perhaps that truth
that history
the kind of thing
whispered when an elder is having a spell
was yet another casualty of
my mother's death
a story untold to a daughter
of our people
though I don't know how much of the literally bloody
charred
tortured
crucified
death marched in the desert
starved
details would have been shared
with me

I hope my mother didn't know the accounts
that I've read in various books
that have haunted me for decades
prone to depression as she was
I've heard

it got far worse in 1915
but who remembers the Armenians
Hitler mused aloud

part of my work as a poet
I know
is to write it the fuck down
including this context

all of it,
because we are the story
it lives in our bodies
and our children
inherit it

we are the living breathing
legacy of
the bloody machinations
of history

this
a offering to James Baldwin
in humble gratitude for coaxing me out of silence
the strength, the gumption
I've gathered from his words
so often for the past weeks
as I write

I see him sometimes
waving at me from across the river
that knowing and wise smile on his face
slightly amused

I include him now
among my Mighty and Beloved Dead
Of Blood and Of Spirit
I like to think of him enjoying some strong Armenian coffee
and of course a cigarette
with Nané

what I got from family,
who all live
or did before they left this mortal coil
in the US
and I saw them infrequently,
were
snippets that painted a more personal picture
of her
some tales funny and badass
like making parachutes in the basement of Hudson's
in Detroit
Rosie the Parachute Maker
(and her English name was actually Rose)
during the war
with little ones at home
using silk thread

that I had a spool of even decades later

typing 140 words per minute with a smoke in her hand

but some of the stories

are so terribly sad

that I could never play

Solitaire

even on my computer at the helpline

between calls (and during when management wasn't around)

without imagining her sitting at

her dying younger daughter's bedside

just 19

and so sick

with a cancer in her blood

laying out the cards

over the hours

the hours

and hours

desperate, praying for miracles

bargaining with the same silent god

who watched the wholesale bloody slaughter,

his faithful locked in churches set ablaze

often enough that it was a known tactic

of the Young Turks

(you can still find bones in the desert near the Euphrates, long after it ran red with blood),

of the first Christian nation

the prospect

of acceptance of this loss

an insult to her universal mother's heart

that beat

with pain and sadness and worry

within her chest

turning single cards across the columns

over and over

until she was gone

her baby

so thin by the end

and there were no more cards to turn

was it better?

now

was she out of pain?

in the story that my heart knows

confirmed by meeting her eyes in certain pictures

she hoped there was that one small mercy

one small reduction in pain

in the world

and also specific to her youngest baby

but it seemed to have hatched

somewhere inside her

anyway

Outside

people mourned the President

November 1963

my Nané died of a broken heart

two years later

on Xmas day 1965

and I don't blame her one fucking bit

her younger daughter was my Aunt Marilyn,

the youngest of three

for whom I'm named

though everyone called her Cookie

and her real name was Zarouhi, which means Princess

her name fit

pretty and kind

as she was

I read her yearbooks, decades later

what people wrote

in the margins and blank pages

next to pictures

the sadness and love for her was plain
I've seen it
even in pictures of kin
I'd never spoken to
in my life
and in the eyes of her heartsick high school friends
who still came by to see my grandmother
and have some coffee and choreg
some of the girls were well into college then
maybe married
in the 2 years between
the deaths
I'd heard
but I don't remember who told me

I have her 45s
and some have said I look like her
although I didn't get a winsome nickname
but my dad was a dick about stuff like that
so I'll have to ask my one cousin
who always called me Kid
and caught flack for it

but being called Kid by the closest I had to a big brother
remains one of few comforts
from my childhood
that is so real
it brought me to tears
years later
when he called me that
in an email

But I know now
the warm smiling radiating
love
the soft embracing
forehead kissing presence
I felt from the pictures my Nané
since I was little
is real

I called her Grandma Rose for a long time
but it didn't roll off the tongue
as such an endearment should

I like to imagine that
she was also imagining me
when she smiled at the camera
in this one picture taken at a
family party
musing,
in that moment, about
a daughter of her own daughter
the older one in this case
so smart
too smart
going to school as long as her older brother did
for engineering
but she studied education instead
and got into Vassar
but a partial scholarship
didn't cover enough
so she stayed local
and became
a Reading Specialist with a Masters of Education
who taught primary school
special ed
in inner city Detroit

she is also now dead

For a long time, I was
it
all that was left
in this one ancient maternal bloodline
this trail of mitochondrial DNA

but now my daughter carries
us on
and I understand my visceral
constant hum
all encompassing

yearning for her
my whole life
much better now

something about that mitochondrial DNA
disputes a lot of what has passed as history
we were on the Armenian Plateau from the Neolithic era and before
our blood is so old and continuous

she's one more of us
my daughter
here on this Earth
And I trust her judgement as to whether she
has babies or not
especially given the state of this horrid place

It's been said that you know it's time to go
when the Armenians leave

After this Solstice
I possess
now
a grit earned
that would humble my old man
at the same time
as the paradoxical
terror
of shit working out
in the gap between
the shit that just resolved
and whatever is next

The heat kept me inside
sad and sulky
pissy and restless
tired and ashamed
down to my bones
of still being fucking tired
even though I don't
leave the fucking house most days
because the world

is a garishly cruel
and bloody
glass palace
that I can't even
fathom how to
anything with anymore

by some miracle
a banjo lesson, off all things
despite my never practicing
and we didn't actually even play in the lesson
redeemed it even again,
The Solstice
with a truth so bright
it burned through
my frozenness

it thawed my fingers
and I started writing
again

that

along with my
roses in full bloom and
so much
green growing so
fast
in the heat
and sudden storms
that you can almost
hear them
reaching
living for
the Light

Gracie and the Old Man

One day, my daughter and I were talking
about my side of the family
laughing about something,
probably something my dad said

When we caught our breath
she paused, looked down, and then at me
intently
and then:

I hope you don't take this the wrong way
because I know your childhood was awful
in so many ways
because your mother died
when you were a baby

And oh my god I can't even imagine
not having a mother
said my daughter
her eyes
that are more like my mother's than mine
threatening to overflow
with a sadness
that I never wanted
to be her inheritance
from me

and I love your whole side of the family
she said
I feel closer to them than dad's
and always have
they're all so funny
like you
it's like being in a room full of yous
at Christmas

she assured me

but I'm so glad that you were raised
by Opa
and not anyone else
like a normal family I mean
like them
well, not like that
I mean what's normal?
but you know

yes, I know
smiling at my daughter's
already legendarily inclusive heart
which does me proud
on the daily
if not more

I know there were a lot of
people
who wanted to adopt you
but I'm glad none of that worked out
as fucked as that sounds

because you wouldn't be you
you wouldn't be MY mom

my aunts are awesome and I love them
and they always get me really nice Xmas presents
and I remember you asked me once who I'd want to live with
if something happened to you and dad and I remember being relieved they
were among the options

but...
they're sort of...boring?
like, I'm trying to say it in a way that
isn't mean because I don't mean it like that
but they don't seem that interested
in much
outside that town
that you hate
that
they never left

except for vacations
and shopping and
they seem sheltered
like they don't know
a lot of different kinds of
people
maybe
though they seem open minded
in some super important ways
like, my friends would be safe
with them

But Opa was the funniest person I've ever known
and did everything
and lived all over
and didn't give one shit
what anybody thought
and even though he said mean things about people
loud sometimes, even
and was kind of an asshole
about some things
and to certain people
he was so fun to be around
when I was little

I just remember laughing all the time
like, every second
we were with him

And he was fun, my dad,
with her
and with me too,
when I was tiny

he openly encouraged her to tell
kids who were mean to her to
go to hell and rot there, those
rotten sons of bitches

he always got her to order
whiskey

when we'd go out to eat
both of them giggling
the two of them in on the joke

he was the proudest, loudest devil on her tiny shoulder
“don't take that shit! punch that son of a bitch in the nose!”
who also insisted on
getting the most extravagant
Xmas presents for her
even though he called
the holiday
just another goddamned day
not worth the drive in a snowstorm
don't be so goddamned stupid

he's hard to describe in few words
but my therapist often mentions a Steve McQueen energy
but tougher and more intimidating
grittier
if you can imagine

he was often (hilariously) mistaken for Jack Nicholson
like at the farm implement store
circa 1974 Collingwood Ontario
especially with the shades he wore at the time
and his '63 Mercedes

Because of that similarity
to Jack Nicholson
a shorthand I've used
as he aged
into the King of all Curmudgeons
is that he's the mix of the character
from About Schmidt
and the one from
As Good As It Gets
but way angrier
more promiscuous
voraciously autodidactic
more offensively opinionated
probably drunker but better practiced at hiding it

rougher edged to the point of drawing blood
and exponentially more world
weary

and he raised me alone
after a time
and a few
bitter family disputes
that only died when he did
in a too-big house
that he built

a memorial to my mother
out in the bush

and since,
it was often said,
like a mantra to ensure one is blessedly
absolved of responsibility,
that nobody could replace my mother
it was assumed, I guess
that I didn't need one
anyway

nobody ever
took the phrase
anywhere past that
didn't think of the next step
a then what

what is one to do
with a motherless daughter
with a dad poisoned
by grief
and pride
and a rage deeper than the gully at the edge of the bush
where the old farm implements and furniture were dumped

everyone so shit scared of
upsetting him

but a little girl
with big eyes that
betrayed the
shameful sadness

of having no mom
who everyone says she looks like
should do just fine
right

alone out in the bush
with him
and the rest of the rotten world
that was
reborn every morning
on the bus to school

At any rate
I was raised by a man who
was 47 when I was born
who'd been a bachelor for
all but 2 and a half years
of a wild life
lived on his terms
whenever remotely
possible

he left the farm at 14
to wash dishes at a restaurant in
Hamilton
and shovelled dirt off the back of a truck
onto the city streets
of Windsor
in the dead of winter
and then
seeking warmer climes he
lived in Vancouver and took up yoga in the late 40s
when he wasn't welding desks for schools
and had to hitchhike part of the way
back to the farm
when his car crapped out

somewhere between Calgary and Regina
and his kid brother had to drive out
to meet him at some place in the prairies
and pick him up
when the Vancouver rain got in his bones
and he craved the sun
that beat down
out in those tobacco fields

He spent the night in jail
at least once
I think one was in Texas
for sleeping in his car

He was well familiar with Route 66 and
went out to California to visit his sister
often
sometimes down to Tijuana even
with a buddy
and went to a dyke bar in the middle of the day
in LA
while he waited for his kid sister to finish work
wondering why he was getting such cut eye
until he realized
he was the only dude there

he lived in Toronto
too
all over the west end
in the late 40s early 50s
within blocks of every
place I lived
when I was downtown
before I had my baby
and moved to the burbs

and right by
my daughter's school
for a time
he lived above a bootlegger's;

he found out one day
when he came home from work
with his buddy Stan
who worked on the TTC
and the cops had arrested
everyone on the first floor

he lived a block away, maybe less
then
(I know I can see the house from the sidewalk on the one side of the massive campus)
from the school she escaped to
when 14 happened

he took welding classes there
at night
after plastering those little post war bungalows all day in the east end

he always told my daughter's disappointing father that if he could burn a rod he could get a job
anywhere
maybe he should think about it
which her disappointing dad did years later but by the time he could thank the old man
my dad had no idea who he was

I could feel him
winking at us
when I took her there
on her first day
amazed that my daughter was walking the same sidewalk he did
so long ago
my heart lightened by the image

he lived all over
my old man
he did everything
had all kinds of tickets
and probably fucked
every
woman
he could
I don't recall any mention
of girlfriends of note

prior to my mom

He took the rap for some bootleg moonshine
made by one of the elderly immigrant friends of my grandparents
when the RCMP searched our farmhouse basement
for stolen property
appliances of some sort if memory serves
apparently brought over by my one
n'er do well uncle from Detroit

my old man's conviction for the possession of illegal alcohol even made one of the Toronto papers
though just a blurb
he got a \$100 fine
he said his lawyer was right out of law school
and it showed

the Mounties had it in for us
for a time
downcountry and then when we had our own farm
on Lake Huron
every branch of the gnarled family tree
on both sides of the border
drew suspicion
they even accused my Oma of opium production
because of the poppies she grew
for a pastry that she made
at least every couple weeks
like almost every other central European
grandmother

and during the war,
when they were sharecroppers downcountry
my grandfather was bothered
by the Mounties
for the Hungarian Communist newspapers he got
in the post

my old man married my mom at 44
many a wild oat sowed, I'm sure
she was 30
and from Detroit

they met at a dance at the legion hall in Sauble Beach
where she was visiting her friend's cottage

No matter how many years had passed
he always would point out different
places of importance
to their story
the falls
the canoe rental place
when we'd go for Sunday drives

she had her Masters in Education
and quit her Ph.D six months
away from finishing
because she was sick of school
so I definitely know she was my mom

he drank, I've read in my
mom's notes
that she had taken
after seeing a psychic
and then tucked away in her jewelry box

then I came along
and she died
right after

and he lived in the
underworld
following the edge of the big river
for a time
two years give or take
mad at god
and sober
which probably made him
madder
from my experience anyway
especially after finding those notes

mad enough that he refused to get me baptized
and so I got to enjoy another layer

of un-belonging
in our very Catholic family
that went to mass every Saturday or Sunday
and I'd go so I could be with them
but I couldn't
commune
and I got to keep my sins to myself

my childhood
was singular
literally

mostly I felt like a nuisance
and also
an errant possession
and an academic show pony
all at once

it got better after I went crazy
and was in the loony bin
for two months
when I was 18
and better still
every time I lost my shit
going forward
and we were eventually
very tight
by my twenties
more still in my 30s
when we could joke
about me being
my father's daughter
as in having a tendency
to bed hop
and we'd laugh
on our supper time call

He hung up on anyone with a
voice that read "male"
until I was 20
and even after that sometimes

so his amusement with my errant ways was a departure

He promised my mom
I could go to school as long as
I wanted
for anything

and then she fucking died
10 days after
I came into this world
from a brutal, butchered labour
so bad
my dad couldn't visit me in the hospital
when my daughter was born
34 years later

but he held up his promise

growing up without a mother
is literally alienating
especially in a small-town

nothing that is true
for anyone else
is true for you
everyone has a mother
technically at least
and most of them survive long enough
to do mom things that help one navigate the world
like make a normal lunch to take to school

mine didn't

I remember taking a
peanut butter on
caraway rye sandwich
with mint jelly
more than once
in my Snoopy lunchbox

and so

between my carte blanche
for post secondary education and
my feeling as though I was hatched
I felt so goddamned out of place
in every place and situation
for my whole life and
my disruptive crazy and
my excellent grades despite no support
and undiagnosed ADHD:

I got to have a wild 20s

I planned leaving that asshole
small town,
that only ever made me
feel like I didn't belong,
since I figured out I could

I had a similarly
wild and varied life
to my dad
though there was way more
school and
I was an activist too
and ditched class to
go to protests
all the time
and
eventually I helped organize them

my dad was a plasterer
mostly
but worked
wherever was hiring
with the Newfies and other East Coasters
who were his buddies
Stan was from Yarmouth

but we walked the streets of the same city,
the old man and I
always west end and south of Dupont

both unchaste libertines of easy virtue
both drank too much
or were otherwise lit up
same bars even
both born
outsiders

I had my daughter at 34
my mother died at 33
I think my dad exhaled
a bit maybe

My daughter
made my dad
the happiest of any
being on the planet
he took out a quarter page
ad in the local paper
to announce her birth
with a picture of her
looking like the wisest
little being ever
smiling in
the bath

the joy she brought him
was soft and pink and giddy
pure
not rotted through
with fear and loss and grief
and while I never doubted his love for me
my birth also birthed
a widower until the day he died

when his mind started
dropping pebbles of itself
all over hells half acre
and I got calls from the police
and the credit union
from 3 hours away to deal with
and he eventually left

whole chunks of who he was
at Frank's maybe
or maybe at Marvin and Lois's
you remember them right?
you know where I left my boots?
I can't find the goddamned things.

but he remembered my girl
when we went to visit
him
at the Lodge
but he thought I was his
kid brother's daughter
up for the weekend
and he asked when was I going home
eventually
but only after first laughing with her
for a long time
still in on the joke
those two

I can see why
the person I love
more than anyone else in this world
is glad I was raised by
someone who felt that way
about me
so fiercely
even though that love
had so much pain
that bled into it
and onto me

My daughter has seen me
handle shit
that is unimaginable
especially the past couple years
alone mostly
when I was shit scared
when it was something completely out of my wheelhouse
when

my ex wouldn't leave
the attic
of the house
my father
bought for her

she saw me handle all of it
at my fucking worst
she saw me fall apart
then get up and keep going
she saw me in despair
and still going to work
in my truck
to take care of babies and
their grownups
she saw me puke every day
almost
for 5 years
and still get up and do
what I had to do that day
even when I'd been hanging
on
to the kitchen sink
for dear life
convulsing with
dry heaves
naked because the preceding hot flash made
me throw off my bathrobe
in the middle of the living room
before racing to the sink
and also I'd
very gracefully
pissed myself
legs wet and some of the floor too
from the force and pressure
and tissue atrophied by a lack of estrogen

and still I was the one
she counted on
period
I could be hours away

and she would still need me to get her home
when she'd been out with friends
somehow
even when her dad was firmly ensconced in his turret
because he was mad she was late
and refused to go get her

I have the old man's grit
which I never could have claimed as mine
had he not raised me
to get used to it
even comfortable to the point of arrogance
to being an
outsider
and take the most pleasure you can
out of it
and get away with it

because you'll never belong
anyway

that all said
i think my old man
and I
hail from some sort of
lineage
of born
interlopers
somehow marked
a wire in the blood
one could say
there's a few of us
twisted branches on the family tree

and my daughter, I know, is one of us
too
and how lucky was she
snuggled to sleep
on the lap of a beloved wise elder
like no other
so very learned in

this blood borne
vocation
of ours

Evan

I had been vibrating with anticipation
for 4 o'clock
hands almost too shaky to safely shave my junk to my exacting standards
of the newly single
cynical
middle aged lady
trying out the apps

my silent potato of an ex rotted just above my head
floorboards and enmity separating us
he seemed well settled into mid afternoon nothingness
lumpily slumped on my best friend's
ancient
queer licentiousness smeared,
decades discarded futon
in his attic fortress
perfect for his phobic ignorant ass
fuming no doubt
at Big Freedia

THE
Black Queen
of NOLA Bounce
telling him
in no uncertain terms
that he don't pay no rent
in the song I played loud enough for him to hear
while I showered and shaved and sang

BITCH I'M YOUR LANDLOOOORD

whilst readying myself for the finest railing
in High Park

I was to meet you,
when your working day of pouring concrete in the June heat was through,
at the McDonalds at Keele and St. Clair
where you would get your coffee
and keep an eye out

for my black Sierra
with the rusted and crunched part
above the drivers side rear wheel well
that almost every GM truck gets

It was two years ago now
that summer of
so long
overdue lust and abandon
of terror and defiance in equal measure
of the trashy messy pleasure of outdoor sex
and the ever vanishing concern for my respectability
though it was illusory at best
anyway

I'm not sure if I should have written more
then, the tales
fresh in my feral body and fuck-addled mind
Or if it's better now
that most of the dicks I sucked
and the various men attached to them
have thankfully ghosted my memory
almost as much as I or they had after a
zipless fuck
or two

I think I tried to write about you
last summer solstice
the late long sunset and short night
the scent warm and green
and enticing
waking up the memory of that one evening
in June

I'm not sure how far I got
with that bit of scribbling

It might even be brilliant
maybe I should dig it out

but the curved and heated blade of

last summer's hell
scraped any memories
like that
out off my head
like an expertly performed
d and c

because I only had room for
panic and brokenness and despair
but my writing was blessedly
tempered by wistful descriptions of the quality of the breeze
in the birches
and the whisper of the approaching fall
in my semi-regular dispatches from my
summer of
exile
to friends and strangers
alike

You had been one of a surprising number of younger men
who showed up on my tinder
when my dude doctor friend suggested lowering my age limits
because I complained about the generally sad state of dick
with regards to men my age or above
my usual

You pursued me
hard
exhilaratingly so
only
a day or so after I'd dumped my first "boyfriend" from the site,
who'd seemed hell bent and intent on clipping my barely freed wings

I'd written a tersely worded email
quickly followed by a brand new tinder profile

my toggling between conversations
with a selection of hot blooded men
eventually funnelled to an exclusive exchange with you
as your words drew my attention away
from lesser prospects

because you were creatively filthier than
anyone else
and exponentially
funnier
and far more visceral
and also did not give me the Ick

You wanted me, you said
counting hours
ticking through the expected
trajectory of your next work day
maybe lunch time
or the day after that
if you were in the west end that day
if perhaps I was partial to
a quick screw
in the
porta potty on your job site
(not especially, given my outsize sense of smell and tendency to puke)
or parked in my truck depending on the availability of a shaded and private spot
I could sit on your face
if I fancied such a thing

I could even have your buddy join
if I was so inclined

I was to expect to
be devoured
an experience unfamiliar
to me
but the possibility
piqued my interest

We settled on a weekday, late afternoon
You requested that I leave my panties at home
though I balked
last minute
and wore expensive Italian black lace ones
purchased a day before in a fancy lingerie store
in Bloor West Village
instead

they were hotter pulled to the side anyway

And so then I was adequately shaved and moisturized and perfumed
my ex listened to muffled angry men shouting from his computer
it drifted down the attic stairs
like the smell of an abattoir
in July
into my bedroom where I dressed
like a whore
with the door open

my hair fell to my shoulders,
a short damask skirt exposed legs,
shaped by genetics and early years of figure skating and chronic heavy boot wearing,
if pale for my blood,
bare, smooth,
insistent upon being touched by rough hands
hastily yet carefully cleaned of concrete dust and hardened splatter
in the McDonalds washroom

I brought black patent leather, never-worn slingback open toed kitten heels to match the skirt
that I flung into the back seat of my truck with the plan of switching to those at the park and
they inevitably landed in wildly disparate spots obscured by empty smoke packs and reusable grocery bags and
used COVID masks from work

my scrubbed silken bare feet were clad in worn out cracked Blundstones
me feeling like a Gen X stereotype
trying to be safe for driving

I wish I could remember the perfume, but I'll insist
based on habit,
it was an amber
Though the pink Brazilian moisturizer
I slathered from head to toe
smelled like the best pussy
in the way that Himalayan Balsam does
Or peaches
sweet
with a whiff
of the bodily

So I may have let that one ride on its own.

The illicit black pill I took kept me chill enough that my hands didn't shake on the steering wheel, though the sweat made them slick on the leather
no matter how cold I had the AC

As I'd dreaded, the McDonalds parking lot was tight
and nerve-rendering
and packed after work
with the weary
and impatient
and overheated
hangry

I made a 40 point turn in order to park in a questionable-for-my-truck spot,
with a reverse manoeuvre taking place short moments later
after texting you
that I'd arrived
my breath still shallow,
my hands as slippery as ever
sliding on the wheel at the most inopportune times

I begged the gods that you didn't see that
I promised them certain offerings
from our afternoon activities
I truly hope you don't mind
if anything, you probably had a run of good luck

You were standing on the concrete island near the drive thru
Your lunch box at your feet and coffee in your hand
You waved when you spotted me
smiling

That's a Halfway House

That's a halfway house, you said
pointing to a house on Keele
apropos nothing
or so I thought

This,
after stepping into my truck
placing your lunch box in my back seat
and
cradling my cheek gently
in the palm of your hand
a finger tracing
from that softest spot
between ear and hairline
then along my jaw

gazing into my eyes

and then kissing me
lips soft
tongue curious first
then quickly determined
whispering
when your lips moved to my neck,
then behind my ear
that I'm even more gorgeous in
person

before even saying hello

It's right by the parole office.
I have to go there to meet my parole officer and do my piss tests.

Oh, I say. Nodding.
I hope that I sound neutral
free of judgement
My hands are slick on the steering wheel anyway

and I hope
you don't attribute it
to me being freaked out
by what you've told me
just now

I'm grateful for an awkward bend in the road that holds my attention for a perfectly timed
break
in the conversation
I skillfully fish a cigarette out of its pack
eyes on the road.
I can no longer recall if you lit it
or if I did

I have to tell you this.
Anyone I date, actually.
I'm on parole. I have been since January.
Ah, I say.
Nodding again
I drag on my smoke
skip the corny song that's playing
I shift my sweaty ass on the seat
not used to wearing a skirt
as you'd requested
in this infernal heat
or ever
grateful that my seats aren't leather
considering my poor bare freshly shaved legs and
I'm glad I didn't listen to your
request to forgo underwear

I'm sorry if this is forward
I demure
but what got you caught up in that horrid system?

Arson.

I exhale a massive cloud of relief
made up entirely of Dunhill smoke

Because not rape not domestic violence not stalking

animal abuse
sitting next to me
in the passengers side
of my truck
sipping a McDonald's coffee
and smoking a Next
after work

In my two year old recollection
you tell me that the mother of your two small children
from whom you'd split up
was being harassed by a guy she'd dumped
repeatedly
He'd bother her when the kids were with her
all hours
She'd call crying.
You could hear your kids crying
on the phone
when they should have been sleeping in their beds

because of this asshole
who still fucking lives with his loser dad
and can't take no for an answer

I'd already talked to him more than once, you said
But she was scared and so the kids were too.
And he wouldn't fucking stop
One night
I was fucked up on blow and Jamesons
I drove to his house
and emptied a jerry can around the perimeter of the house
lit a book of matches
and split

His dad had been home, sleeping,
in a recliner
but got out.
Uninjured

You can google me
you say

giving me your last
name
that I would not have gleaned
from Tinder

It's all there.
Everything I've told you.

Some asshole with an ax to grind narced me out
the cops leaned on my ex
threatened her with CAS
and there was the CCTV video
that they played on CP24
every 15 minutes
so even someone sitting in the dentist's chair
or in an elevator
would see it
So I turned myself in
pleaded out.
I got three years.
I got out early for good behaviour
but I'm on parole until next year.

Well hell, I say.
Softly.
Humbled.
I hope you felt your words land
on a pillow
because Jesus Christ on a bike that must be
hard to spit out
on a first date

I pause, not wanting to to lay it on thick but also wanting to acknowledge the gravity
the violence
and the valiance

I look over at you
when we are
stopped at the light

you drag deeply

on your cigarette
flicking it
staccato
with your thumb
and look out the window

You are 37 to my 49.
A November baby
While I was born in February
You feel very young
to me
and brave
in that moment
so much
that my wise and foolish heart
reminds me
that one can
never
not be a mother
once one is
and so is prone
to surprise heartfelt
protective urges

I'm relieved and yet also disappointed
that my boobs didn't leak

I take my right hand off the wheel
for a moment
my fingers brush against your wrist, lightly
so you know I'm still
here
present
not planning an out

For what it's worth, I get why you did it.
Shit, I would too.
I don't actually think you did anything so wrong.
I'm sorry you got narced out.

You know,

you say,
the reason I liked your profile
and messaged you right away when you liked mine
is because it says ACAB
I never saw any other woman say that in a profile.
It made me hopeful you'd be cool
about my situation, and in general
I mean, you're gorgeous, my god, but I've never seen
anything like
what you wrote
I loved every word

Well I'm kind of a weirdo, I grin.
And an old school anarchist
I hate prisons and cops
And I do like to write.
Sometimes.

I feel my face redden
a flush of crimson and sweat
from hearing such
a sweet unexpected compliment
and also
a hot flash
probably

I like weirdos, you say.
And I believe you.

We talk more on the way to the park.
There is an ease that I am unaccustomed to
so soon
or ever

I apologize for a sudden but necessary stomp on the brakes
due to a fellow driver
not realizing that their lane ended
that caused you to pitch forward
hard against the seatbelt.

You look at me,

querying

Why are you apologizing?

I laugh

Oh sometimes I worry I'm a shitty driver.

My ex rode my ass about my driving.

It was a running fucking commentary.

Mine and everyone else's.

And so you'd fuck up more.

Yes.

Nice.

What a piece of shit.

Thank you, I say.

Humbled again

at being seen,

of someone

a dude even

knowing

that

without me having

to justify

or explain

how fucked it is

to live like that

for almost two decades

I can feel you turn to face me

though my eyes are on the road.

My mom dated guys like that.

That's how insecure dirtbags act.

We got to the park and of course I fucked up parking and turned

in such a way

that it was not especially safe or convenient

for a gaggle of cyclists

And still you defended me

to me

after telling the group of cyclists to get over themselves

We found a spot off of a secluded footpath

with conveniently

placed

logs

of varying shapes and heights

your lunchbox

a convenient adjunct

for certain

acts

The sex was the most spectacular of my life at that point

shockingly so

and you sure as hell weren't my first rodeo

ride

and I loudly proclaim my love

of fucking

with zero shame

it's very much deserving of its own

portrait

though I am

as yet

unsure of the medium

that would truly

do it

justice

I still have flashes of certain moments,

even though it was so long ago now

in both standard

government

and experiential

though maybe not evolutionary

time

Seconds

made outsized

compared to the billions
of others
that make up
a life

an open-eyed
smiling glance
from above
from below
our eyes a sirens song
a seductive harmony
to connect
deeper and deeper
the biting of a bottom lip
in anticipatory
ecstasy
the clasping of each other's hands
when my mouth is on you
or yours on me
when that sort of thing isn't usually done
hand holding
any hint of sweetness is
hardly necessary
with a park fuck

a squeeze
the gentle stroke of a thumb
against a palm
the moment of climax
whispered
unexpected
a surprise

a concurrent heart flip
another surprise

they still
ferry my attention
away,
those moments
back to that spot

off the jogging path,
when certain stars align

as they surely must have that day
so close to the Solstice

Sometimes I wonder if those flashes ever dazzle you as well
the throes of ecstasy we shared
if you have such things
unexpected wistful moments
these days

The Solstice made for a blessedly long evening
wisely created by
the gods of our kind
for
languid park sex

afterwards we strolled
along the path
after surreptitiously
jumping back onto it
as if we hadn't just
engaged
in the most
carnal beauty

as if we didn't just have to wipe bodily fluids off of each other
with used COVID masks from my purse
checking each other to be sure
after
leaving no evidence of
what we'd beautifully committed

just a few feet into the brush
on well placed logs
and your lunchbox

We sat on a bench and talked for hours
stopping only
to kiss

Even though you'd been up since 4 am
sweating
pouring concrete
under a Solstice sun
at Keele and St. Clair
where I'd picked you up
at the McDonalds

We shared with each other
selected chapters
of our respective
books
some light anecdotes
and some that cut
to the bone
and deeper
some even sever
pieces clean off

I was heartened to learn that if you vote Tory in prison
you'll get your ass handed to you
because Conservatives fuck prisoners over to score political points
with other
cheap hateful opportunistic cunts
dummies who vote for them
and private prison corporations

You like Jagmeet Singh, personally
you tell me
and I shared my preference for Charlie Angus
during the leadership race

You told me about your mom
a child herself when you were born
from my middle aged,
one year short of being a "geriatric primagravida" when I had G
perspective

the held-tight
love in the chaos
the deep respect

the longest grief
clear in your words

and about the one step dad who
treated you like his own
son
and you cried at his funeral
that you'd gone to alone

I told you about losing my mom at birth
and how my dad was basically
Steve McQueen
but harder

my feral childhood
the farm that I wandered
tiny and most often alone
my bare feet on hot sand
when I wandered too far
afield
often into an actual field
although I also liked the implement shed
and the abandoned chicken coop
the barns were boring mostly
except for the dump truck

the bush
me a bit older
where I hid
in cedars downed by a winter storm
the roots can be like a cave when they topple
watching other kids pass
in groups
playing and laughing
me silent
as I'd follow the creek
until I couldn't anymore
and had to turn back

I may have told you about
the crow with the broken wing

who was my companion
on lonesome summer
afternoons
the crow
was cared for by my grandfather
in a cage until their wing healed
I was 4
and we would talk and laugh
the crow and me
just the two of us
in the dusty abandoned garage of the old farm house hadn't been lived in for decades
windows so dirty
it was dark
unless the big
rotting wooden
door was open

I doubt my grandmother
knew of our
hidden patient
and they would have surely died
had she

and
I told you about
another old farm house
the one where I was likely conceived
where I played in the attic
by myself
just a baby alone
in a room
filled with my mother's old books

a lonesomeness
that was too natural
for such a little girl

in case you were wondering
it never leaves

and my dad and I

would go on long road trips
and I would be allowed to sit at the bar in
certain locales
when my dad felt like a drink
which was usually
and if there was nobody to watch me,
like an elderly couple who owned the motel,
or a middle aged lady who looked at my dad
like he was lunch

he was a slut, I was told when I was older
by a drunk aunt

at any rate
it was the 70s
nobody gave a shit

and I could have a Fresca at the bar because it was sugar free
but no straw
for reasons that make no sense
to me now
as a mother

and I told you about my beloved Uncle Frank
my first dad, really
who'd died exactly a month after
my marriage imploded
on my daughter's 15th birthday
and how devastating it was
because he showed me love
when nobody else fucking
bothered
and insisted that I belonged
despite all evidence to the contrary

the master of compassion, the priest had called him at his funeral
and even my jaded Luciferian heart swelled with pride and reverence
and made me cry even harder

everything I learned about kindness
especially of the mischievous, secret sort

the kind graciously received
when it seems like you're just a nuisance
to the rest of the small world
comprised
of the crowd of houses on the edge of the fields

I was his enthusiastic apprentice in irreverence

he also taught
in his curriculum
curiosity instead of judgment
and most of all
to speak up so that everyone felt
and actually was
included
to speak up
even to loved ones
who should've known better

He possessed these divine gifts
of making people feel safe
and beyond safe
that someone had your back
and he could, by some miracle
elicit a laugh
from someone in the depths of whatever hell they were in

One time I went crazy when my dad
happened to be in Florida on vacation
I was 19
it was bad
it was my second or third residency
on the infamous 4th floor of the Owen Sound hospital
they took away my clothes and
I had a "no-go" on my ankle so
I couldn't leave the ward
without being tackled and injected with a massive dose of Ativan

And he was the only one who showed up
after visiting hours but they made an exception
Pissed as hell that they took away my clothes

but quickly pivoted to focus on making me laugh

His own daughter worked in the hospital
a nurse in intensive care
one or two floors up
and never visited me once
during any of my tenures
in the loony bin

I learned all that from him
and then he died
right when everything else had gone to shit
and he was Grace's favourite uncle
from when she was a newborn
she'd fall asleep in his arms
like I once had

it wasn't all so serious
our talk
even when it was
as it often is
with people who have
had so many damned sadnesses
because otherwise
how the fuck do you get by
day to day

I lazily played with your cock this whole time
through your shorts

we kissed between sad and funny stories
the tastes of those
so familiar
like home

mom's cooking
for the orphaned
and neglected

I realized later
maybe late in the morning after that evening when we sat on a bench

and talked under the tall trees
that we were once
two babes
lost
in the woods,
in this
wicked dismissive world
though in different
tales
different books
on adjacent shelves

my woods were hours to the northwest of yours
with deeper, more isolating winters
Huron
not Ontario
closer to the shore
a decade earlier
and minus a
mother

in ways,
mine was the more classic fairy tale
where every girl protagonist's mother
dies giving birth
or they at least kick off
before the start of the story

two lost babies
who grew up somehow
with so many scars
that we made into tattoos
our stories illustrated
picture books
of flesh
tragedies transmuted into tiger lilies
and grandmothers into roses
and loved ones names
living and dead
sometimes encoded,
or woven into another image

so that they will always be with us
as long as we draw breath
as long as our skin
doesn't rot in the ground

or burn

and then one midsummer's eve

a necessary fate
a spell that
created itself
to keep the
wheel
turning

a ritual in High Park
like I used to go to on the Solstice
with the cliquy Wiccans
and pervy old man Morris Dancers
decades before
except this was
actually magick

that is my
educated
elder witch guess
and I'd hedge a bet on it

two babies
cast in darkness
like lost wax
cast into darkness
from the start
living
for moments
of this
living in the light
of pleasure
of freely feeling
love in the body

just for a couple hours
in the days
of the strongest sun

desire so strong
it fucking shone
bright
and long

I drove you to Lansdowne subway
I think
or maybe even further east from the park
as the sun dipped in the west
in the rearview
painting everything
pink
even the air
felt pink against
the skin

We kissed for a long time
resisting conclusion
tasting stories
recognition
savouring any drops
left

One does not ever forget
that kind of gift
from the silent gods
of our kind
who delight in sweat licked under
a late afternoon sun

a destined meeting of two
of their solitary
devotees
bathing each other
in pleasure
and empathy
seeing each other's wounds

and kissing them in reverence
knowing them to be
essential to
such lovers'
makeup

But such evenings
(I foresaw but ignored)
are never to be repeated
that our kind
made mostly of scars
with wits made of razors
can only handle so much
joy
in one another
the window can only be open
for so long
the magick
dies
in the mundane

because this world
is what it is
and we are our broken
hearted broken baby
selves
once so small yet still lost
and found
in the woods
trying to play some game
thinking we'll survive
enough
to keep the wheel turning

Friday of a Long Weekend

It's not as though I thought it would turn out
any different

lustful Solstice
fried delusions
and wishes
aside

If I had to pinpoint when it went to shit
for me anyway
I'd have to guess
it was that time I met you
down by Humber Bay
for sex
and brought you a coffee

you'd been finishing
concrete outside
Scaddabush
an establishment
that I can best describe
as
basic bitch Italian
bloodless 10 years married date night
resto-chain
housed on
the retail floor
of another
soul-free
pile of glass
and steel
all sharp ugly angles
nothing round
or fluid or resembling
nature in any way
polluting the shore
with pedestrian pasta
and ghost hotels

Just as I was leaving to meet you
more harried than usual,
desperate to leave the house
to escape my ex and his stench,
the contrast in respective olfactory content
stark
after my fragrant floral amber shower,
to walk into a wall
of middle aged garbage processed meat heavy diet
grease cloud
mixed apparently
with some molecule
that is an aging hormone precursor
occurring most often in middle aged men

it's related to that "old person smell"
and the melange fucks
to create a stink
that feels too goddamned close

if you're unfamiliar,
it smells like a pillowcase that hasn't
been washed ever
but has been on the same pillow for a decade

and because he's an asshole without a lick of honour
I can say that I would purchase Simple Green grease cutter from Canadian Tire
after Dawn dish soap failed
and soak his hats and pillow cases
in a bucket of strong solution
before washing them
such a good wife was I
and I'd still have to throw them out

I cried once because I'd washed my new
ridiculously expensive and sensuous
linen sheets
in my favourite colour
purchased once I decided I was done
with him

three months after he infested my attic with
his ignorance and stench

but he'd used the fucking dryer before me
and my sheets stank of him
even though we hadn't touched
in months

he'd slammed around the kitchen
before I'd gotten ready
knowingly and intentionally
jangling my nerves more than usual
and had his usual moronic fascist
garbage playing upstairs in his
adult pillow fort

I wanted out of that
and I wanted to see you
to feel the butterflies
to taste you
and of course you always smelled divine
a feral relief
an antidote
to him

as I was getting in my truck, you texted
and asked me to
get you a coffee
at Tim Hortons
on the way

I was in a rush and it was hot
but I said ok
despite feeling like
ants
were erupting out
of my skin
and crawling
all over me

and it nagged me

for some reason

I resisted feeling
indignant

it wasn't because I was averse
to doing you a solid

especially you
because I could feel my heart smile
whenever I talked to you

but because it's
the kind of favour
you'd ask of your wife
or girlfriend

(though knowing that role too well,
most would do it without having to be asked,
fucking trained seals that we were once
or still are)

a complete
pain in my ass
with my big black
dick-swinger of a truck
tattooed with rusty crunched
off parts that highlight my
poor visual spatial ability
at that squeezey
crowded
location
at a nexus
of condos
the food terminal,
the Lakeshore,
the Gardiner,
and The Queensway

You were very grateful
though

gracious, if I'm truthful
like I'd shown up
with something far more precious
than a double double
and that made up
for it
enough
that I sucked
your cock
extra good

we scouted a somewhat
secluded spot right on the shore
and did our beautiful carnal things
right around supper time
as folks of all ages and
group configurations
moved past at varying speeds by various means
bikes and strollers and sandals
as the waves lazily
lapped the rocks
and the graffitied pile
of broken concrete
that
we sat on

spectacularly, I might add
the cocksucking
I sucked your cock like the literal
Succubus I am
though I will never be summoned
because a Queen,
of sucking cock or otherwise,
doesn't come when called

you have the visual
evidence
of my prowess
as suggested by
me
cocksucker of record

I'm glad you told me that
you fucking hated pimps
in the joint
that they were barely above pedos
and rapists and wife beaters
to you
because they made their money off
of women's work
thieves, all
work that women took all the fucking risk for

otherwise I might worry you'd
distribute
any footage you took

your breathing audible as I ran my
tongue
greedily savouring you
from the base of your cock
to the tip
slowly
then sliding my lips
over the head
and slowly licking
you more
eliciting a surprised
gasp

while holding eye contact
the entire time
until I changed
tack
momentarily

I once again
used an old
COVID mask
to wipe your
forensics
off my cheek

my neck
and the glob
in my cleavage

I made you take a picture
of your cum
on my perfectly made up
face

You'd think I'd
consider bringing a
napkin
given that I'd just fucking
done a whore's penance
in the
Tim's Drive Thru

We talked and laughed
after
as we had after
before

you said you didn't have much time
because you had to travel two hours
home
on transit
and then be up
a couple hours after that
and back at it
in the late June heat

as we walked back to my truck
I reached for your hand
because I wanted
your flesh on mine
again
short on time
as we were

you didn't take it

even though you had before
at High Park

I was mortified
I felt my face flush
then blanch
feeling sick
I fished through my purse
looking down and then
casually turned away and
I lit a smoke
curled over against the wind
coming off the lake
taking my time
so I could
hide my face
from you
for a second
in case there were
tears
welling up
in the eyes that had just looked
into yours
as I held your cock in my mouth

I'd rather die
than let you see me cry
after
that

maybe you didn't like
my funny story
about fucking this guy on the weekend
and my menstrual disc
shifting when I got on top
and how he received
a spontaneous baptism in witch's blood
winner winner chicken dinner

and he had a bidet
thinking himself very clever and cosmopolitan

and hygiene forward
but had nothing to wipe off with
after
which still baffles me

we smoked
standing on a big rock as you listened
to my ridiculous story

post-blowing-your-load-all-over-me

I've since considered that it may
have been a tale
better told
prior to post-orgasm
clarity

you told me about some
soccer mom
you hung with a couple nights prior
who was nothing
to write home
about
you felt like a novelty
she'd picked up somewhere

Is that where it cracked?
where the seemingly tectonic rupture
happened
where it all changed
the muddled messy explosion
of tinderfuck lover
no question of monogamy
the weirdness
of girlfriend not girlfriend
whore-buddy-confessor-best-cocksucker-in-this-life
hot-old-broad-with-a-beatup-pickup-truck
friend-with-more-benefits-than-you-could-imagine
sweetness and lust
and waiting
push and pull

chase and run

I'd wondered about
the possibility of your work buddies
perhaps still hanging about
to see you give any quarter
to that chick in the tank top and boots
who brought you a coffee

like a fucking
chump
like
a girlfriend

some desperate bitch
dying for your cock

the rest of it
the days, short weeks
felt made up entirely of miscommunication
misunderstood silences
begrudged
anxious waiting
for a reply

days almost turning into weeks
this stupid fucking game
and here I thought we'd
both
cashed in our chips
long ago

I tried to tell myself
that you unmatched from me
on that infernal app
because you already had my number

you saw me again,
twice,
after that so that must be it
it's totally not because you're fixing to ghost me

not at all

you were grouchy
that it took me
and also you
so long to cum
that time in the hotel
on Bloor
that last afternoon

I guess
we shouldn't have waited for you to shower
because it had taken you longer to get there
than we'd planned
and I wonder if you misinterpreted
my enthusiastic tour of the bathroom
upon your arrival
as my implying that you were gross
with sweat

I just thought that you'd feel better
after your long day

the time
the travel
no car
living at your brother's as per parole conditions
the lack of sleep
the punishing labour
eternal paperwork

and
somehow it felt

like my fault

and so
the broken doll
in me
sucked your cock extra long
and dirty

to attempt to fix it

I ate the hurt
the urge to hide
hoping for
a nicer
dessert
in time

maybe when
time parole distance
broke and broken
hang about exes
short on rent
hungry kids
weren't such a
going concern

but maybe we both knew
that
such things
like us,
don't keep
so well

not rare things
with tender
buds
delicate and
germinated under
a solstice evening sun

maybe some things
are only meant
to tap our shoulders
in memories
soft and smiling
and sometimes
maybe a little sad

or perplex us

when the smell of
high summer
gets up in your nose
and the blood
rises like
a cobra
charmed
by ancient words
sung to the Sun

but that is later
with softened edges
an almost-consolation

in the interest of emotional honesty
and because such admissions no longer
shame me
let me tell you
there are few things
that kick one
in the heart
so viciously
yet bloodlessly
as a
good night kiss
though the sun had not yet set
at the door to the subway
after our last afternoon fuck
in a fancy hotel
given begrudgingly

and I am still annoyed with myself
for chasing you
even a little
even shifting my weight towards you
for another kiss
when I fucking knew better

I know when people
are walking away

I know before they do

I wore heels
because they make my ass look alright
and so was half an inch
taller than you

I wondered, in that split second
if that had set you off
somehow
and strutted slowly away
the constant pain in my hip
expertly obscured
by my
hereditary swagger
made of unrelenting ache
and fuck you defiance

we'd made tentative plans
at some point
hopeful
for some weekend or another
later
though such things
were always complicated
by the rules of your
parole
we joked that I could hire you
to do something with concrete
at the cabin

I would write
a very convincing letter
I'd use the letters after my name
that were hard earned
though nobody knows
or cares
what they mean
anyway

weeknights were so hard

with that punishing inhuman schedule
I recall keeping an eye on the weather
waiting for rain
no work those days
but we could fuck in my truck
I could drive out to Markham
maybe

While we were smoking outside
on Philosophers Walk
across from the hotel
that used to be the Intercontinental
and is now a Sonesta
sister to the one
in New Orleans
which surprised me for some reason

this one is nice
the NOLA one is spectacular
I'd said
on the elevator
down to smoke

you'd told me about
the complexities of
navigating several parole
regions
where you're allowed and
when
with who
and under which circumstances
emails and signatures and special permissions
paperwork that you must have on
your person
you still had your Young Offender ID number memorized
you'd been in the shit so long

all this just so you could see your kids
for the Canada Day long weekend

that actually felt criminal

to me
just unnecessary
systemic cruelty

The only hotel you could get was
on the far side
of fucking
Oshawa
off the 401
that you'd all be taking transit to get to
during the goddamned Friday commute
of a long weekend
eastbound

You had to deal
with three different
offices
just to hang with
your kids
and swim
in a hotel pool
for a day or two
and eat the
complimentary
continental breakfast
and check out
before you'd
barely settled in
before it could feel like
before
with them
even for a little

as for my Friday of that
long weekend
I drove to the cabin
alone but for the songs I sang along to

for once with no plans
to get laid
at least not

any concrete
ones

Even before that
though
I'd said
to anyone I talked to about you
that we triggered each other
in the best carnal ways
and the best visceral empathy and understanding
of fucked up childhood ways
and also the absolute most horrid ways
that cut deep
and made me
feel like I'd bleed out
before I even knew
that I'd been sliced open
as if you'd used a Japanese razor
the kind I've stopped using
on my legs
because I don't need any more
blood loss
undetectable by pain
or any more scars

I didn't know that
it wouldn't always
balance out

And on that drive
I felt
like the
motherless child
that I legitimately
am
not the simile
not some blues song
not a cliché

and anyway unless you are one
a motherless child

you don't know how it feels
and if you knew your mom
you still don't know I feel

As I drove northeast
laying the hammer down to get the fuck away
as fast as possible
wishing I could fly
as green and fragrant replaced grey and exhaust
and stretches of forest
soon became the dominant landscape
and the hills and blind corners
challenged my attention

I considered that for much of my life
I'd felt as though
I existed
in a cloud of some sort
of repellent
like I'd picked up on it for the first time, finally
something that signals, perhaps imperceptibly
that my mother didn't love me
the choices available to her don't matter
as to whether a mark is left
or not

the fact remains
that there is an aura
that is a tell, though I'm not sure how
that I am slightly less human
that what is learned at the mother's breast
primal and basic and universal
is still a mystery to me
and I am therefor suspect
and not one to
stay with
longer than
necessary

Once I had wif
after getting

the cabin
up and running
I checked my phone

You'd replied
surprisingly
to some text I'd sent
a day or so
earlier

It must have come somewhere between Bancroft
and the cabin
because that was
the last time I was able to check
my phone that
only communicated music
that whole drive after that gas and pee stop
up 62

you sent me
pics of your kids
they were older than
I had imagined them to be
happy though

at the hotel
in the room
and at the pool
snacks and cans of pop
covered the table
white hotel towels already
strewn about the room
the bedspreads already
peeled off
an agreed upon movie
on the tv

quiet for now
your little girl already fell asleep

we'll talk next week
we said

but I knew
that we wouldn't

I am
too long marked
to be reassured
by something
so intimate
as pics
of your most beloved

I haven't been fooled by that
since childhood

I have the bitterest
superpower
of knowing
I'll be on the outs
eventually
most times
no matter how much
someone shares
of themselves
with me
because really
I just have
strong shoulders
and I won't say
shit
when you bail

I have my father's pride
I'll die first
before you'll ever know you hurt me
not right away

Our first time
together
we talked about Tyler Childers
in the truck
and listened to a few of his songs

when you'd told me
about how he blew your mind
when you heard Whitehouse Road
that first time

you'd been making hash
with a buddy
and it felt
like that song was written
just for you

When I figured it wasn't
overly pathetic
or at least not enough
to do more damage
make it worse
or hurt me more
I thought maybe I could send you a song

I never never never should have used the word smitten anywhere
near you
especially not in writing
a text even
jesus christ
or threatened to make you a playlist
but what can I say
I felt decades younger
and you said my pussy
was tighter than some 29 year old's
who you'd banged recently
you came with me when you normally did
not
every time
i was in my feelings
and part of the whole thing
all of it
was
"dare I?"

I did send you TC's version
of Down Low

live
with Town Mountain
because it reminded me of you
and the banjo
is fire
I even learned
the licks

though later
when I could listen to it again

one time months later I texted that I
hated how much I missed you
and have regretted it since

Then time
just time
the passing of more Solstices
and Equinoxes

big stuff resolves
papers get signed
we get let off
whatever hook we've been hung on
our children get older

In my case,
I fell in love
openly smitten still two years in
I met him about 13 days
after the last time we were together
I took a chance because
of his Lilith sigil tattoo

He licked clean
tended to
and healed
all
my wounds from you
necessary ones
and acute,

but so many overlaid older wounds
he saw them all
from you or not
and mused lovingly
while putting bug spray on my back
not a month after
you
that I'm just naturally beautiful
just like that
a fact based on observation

demanding nothing from me

had it not been for you

maybe I wouldn't have
felt how deeply loved
one can feel
when someone sees you
and loves the parts
you don't like to show
to anyone
never mind a lover

and stays

some memories soften
many don't
and
you've just become
art

that's what we
motherless daughters,
or otherwise lonely little girls do
with the memories
of those who discarded us
anymore
especially when we are
finally
well loved

what else is there
to do with all of it

at least we
get that

some semblance
of legacy
and grace

Heavy Eyes Ain't Born For Resting

You've gotten lots of airtime
lately
blathering as I've been
to:
certain friends, my therapist
and, perhaps surprisingly
to many, even most,
my lover

who dances with my shadow
with a dark reverent grace
and a ravenous lust
to taste and to know
devour
and also a recognition
and a depth of love I dared not dream
possible

knowing when to mirror me
and when to diverge
in this constant
dance

to dip
or duck
when I dive
for example
and
he is strong enough
to lift me up
and twirl me
like I'm no
burden at all
like I'm a
long stemmed rose
an offering

to a dark goddess

and he has bled
from the thorns
I thought I'd
filed down
by now

I suspect you'd like him
personal relational configurations
aside
you share many
experiences in your
respective histories
and sensibilities
and hail from roughly the same
neck of the woods

the three of us
babes in the
woods
lost and found
then lost again
an endless cycle
all of us on that wheel
somewhere

it's easy to get stuck

but I digress
as I always do
it's part of my apparent charm

This past Solstice
this peak season
of
light and heat,
and, frankly
it's too goddamn loud

after a brutal grey winter
bereft of the soft and quiet consolation of snow,
that my Lake Huron soul

requires

and here now
a prolific insistent verdancy
bordering on
obscenity
in the best way possible
the smell of the various
weeds of June
crushed
as if under bodies
our bodies
woke your ghost up
in me

maybe when I was pulling weeds

not that you're ever really gone
even I'm sheepish to admit
it surprised a few
even those who were
fucking there
in real time
when it went down

even my therapist

I guess I hide certain kinds of crazy
better than others

most are quite perplexed
given how I've trudged through
years of hell
and yet still able to
love
and be loved
so deeply

it must be some past life
stuff
some unfinished business

it has been suggested
more than one would expect
even among my sort of friends

one surmised that now said business
must surely be finished
perhaps just by the connection manifesting
at all
if explosively
and then ending

but did it?
end?
what the hell is the point of that?
nothing ever bloody feels finished
if anything, any open question
has widened its gape
the maddening unknowable
turning a simple rabbit hole
into a warren
rivaling mycelium
in its structural complexity
in the inherently evasive
unspoken-ness
of it all

these mysteries
chewing holes in my heart

and the rabbits' warren
seems to be connected
with a haunted mansion
featuring secret passages through false library walls
that I'd always wanted, truth be told
and time jumps in conservatories with broken windows
that allow the stubborn neglected
plant denizens
and shapeshifters
to confer
in the dark

and I don't even know what the fuck they want
in all this
but I know better than to
bother trying to figure it out

I have wondered, recently
if maybe you've left this mortal coil
because I usually only have these kinds
of interactions
with those already passed on
or fixing to be on their way
known to them or not

I've always been like that
a side effect
I suppose
of having a dead mother
since birth

my dad, for example,
haunted his house when he was still very much alive
living as he was
in that "goddamned hotel"
that everyone else calls "retirement living"

his ghost showed different faces
so it was a mixed bag as to what I got
depending on what I'd gotten up to
in the house
he no longer lived in

throwing out his ancient boxers
seemed to trigger a certain
consternation

mostly he was indignant and frustrated
a state of being familiar to any who knew him

as for the title

I've been wondering if you like Zach Bryan

he's come out with a lot of good stuff
in the past couple years
and he's become as important as
Petty
to my daily survival

I think we talked about him
that one day
on the drive to
High Park maybe

Most Tyler Childers fans
also like him
but I seem to recall that you weren't so familiar
with his stuff
but maybe I'm mistaken

It's dumb I know
a ridiculous thing to ponder
so much later
after so much unnecessary everything
everywhere and
with the world in the state it's in

But a lot of his songs sound more
like you
than Tyler's do
to me anyway
a slight shift in sweetness through similar flavours
of pain
you're more Sweet Deanne than Follow You to Virgie
and I can almost picture you saying some of his
other lyrics, too
though not to me

I don't dare, actually

maybe it's a dead mother thing
Zach, you, me

it's almost like

he's been reading your mail

I reckon you're accustomed to that
in a more literal way
no metaphor there

this is the nonsense that occupies
my mind
when I'm up until dawn
talking to ghosts
a bit too stoned
with the music up a bit too loud

a planned, deliberate week of
solitary debauchery
if one can picture it
a necessary cleansing of guilt and shame
clearing those dams
to let the stories and songs flow

an exorcism of all the shouting
judgement and self hatred

a healing rest
of conferring with my spectral muses
and loved ones

until dawn

naughty puss, I know

all that sex flowing from
my fingers
saturating my mind
and wherever I happen to be sitting
when I should be sleeping
and keeping respectable hours

you'd think
I'm maybe up to no good

but who am I talking to?
of course you know

At 51, I've done my time
playing by the rules
and I didn't write shit

I'd knit and garden
my hands stubbornly
seasonal
changing at each Equinox
from one to the other
involuntarily
unfinished projects and neglected plants
often in the same messy
spaces

I've got 45 years of imposter syndrome
crap gumming up
the works
and these wild nights,
these makeout sessions with the dawn
feeling kissed from head to toe
with sweet air
make me feel
as though my brain
isn't addled
by this world
and how I unfortunately came into it

I said in another poem
that you've become art
(in a tone that could perhaps be read as unnecessarily dismissive given the significance)
but
I'm writing again
so thank you for that

I stand,
palms pressed together at my heart
in gratitude
to your awakened ghost

not letting my blood rest
when the sun is down

this time, though,
we dance
in the dark
not under the
inescapable June light
which can cruelly deny one the dignity
of being able to hide something
anything
or somewhere
at least

I can still see you
in the sunless hours,

even though I never did
see you after sunset
in all the time we were

and though we're just shadows
faint on a moonless night
the distant stars
provide a glow
that dazzles but
is stingy with the light strong enough
for contrast

but I can still see you
like a fairy tale wish
granted

Maybe I'm just seeing my own
shadow
out here in the woods
in the clearing by my cabin

my skin scratched and sticky with blood as I foolishly wander bare legged,
reminiscent of my favourite line in Feathered Indians,
in the blackberry bushes and pin cherries

in the birches and white pine
while the world sleeps
in its concrete
casket

maybe it doesn't matter
in this kind of dance

and anyway
my heavy eyes
weren't born
for restin'

