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From Here It Is a Patch of Silver

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From Here It Is a Patch of Silver

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Caroline Petty

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2017

from here it is a
patch of silver

dedicated to

Celia, for honestly everything. I am so grateful to have had you as my guide throughout this process. Thank you for pushing me to uncover my intentions, to strive for clarity, to enjoy writing.

My parents, **Dave and Alison**, for your endless enthusiasm, support, love.

Christy, for your determination in all you do, wise sisterly tidbits, understanding.

Lola, for your impenetrable personality, sense of humor, self-assuredness.

Megan, for your unwavering friendship, patience, forgiveness.

Cari, for your writer's eye, immovable strength, like-minded weirdness.

Peter, for your honesty in everything, gentle spirit, encouragement.

Zak, for your curiosity, willingness to listen, impeccable kindness.

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the milkman

With his wooden crate of glass bottles has never set foot on my porch.

Because I do not have a porch and also because there are no milkmen in this area at this time. I have also been drinking less milk these days, and in recipes that call for it—so long as the science of baking is not involved—I use heavy cream in its place.

I yearn for the milkman to bring me the bottles of milk.

I crave that layer of freshly delivered cream,
to watch it billow in my morning tea, to pour the rest into a shallow porcelain dish on the tile floor for the orange cat. I want to move through my week rigid with the routine of empty bottles, payment, full bottles, using yogurt when I forget to bring the bottles inside and find them on the porch filled with sun curdled milk, waiting for the truck to drive down my street, confronting the man, negotiation, condensation on the glass blotting the corners of the dollar bills, empty bottles decorating the street's stoops. I like how the sunlight shatters around the base of the bottle and the milkman who is sick of noticing it grabs the glass by the neck and watches where he steps instead of how the puddle of light shimmies and licks at his hand.

There isn't much urgency involved in going to the store and heaving a plastic gallon off a refrigerator shelf, hearing it wub as it falls into the cart. There are no clear stakes with the grocery store milk jug.

l i t t l e s t

i.

I never told the third leather button
on my wool winter coat how much
I valued it, or how resilient the little navy string
keeping it stitched to the fabric had been
for putting up with the daily abuse of stretching
over layers of sweaters and scarves,
until I felt the draft in the coat's opening
and found the buttonhole empty, just an unfilled slit,
and the string twitching in the wind
like a beetle's antennae.

ii.

Here is a life that does not breathe
but changes shape in sunlight
and baths. Taller. New
shoots, new
leaves

claim space,
extend stalks like
sets of lounging legs
careless and full on display
by bedside. In all lights we drink

together. But let me leave, maybe
with door or window open
for some kind of breath
the leaves can
take in.

I'll look
forward to finding
evidence of progress
after months of snow when
I return and ask "miss me?" Under rug

a dust pile suggests decades of abandonment
with mid-winter air, sore in scent:
a bruised taste pressing
on my cheeks through
open window

meant to be
a breath for plants
left with walls and heat vents,
no baths apart from melted snow that
slips through the holes in the screen. Here find

stiff grey twists and stripes of heavy brown that pull
towards soil seeking to hide and re-root.
I say “grow” ask “why?” Between
wallpaper and terracotta rim
a prism of web with

strings stretched
across pebbles, there
could be eggs unhatched on
waning stems turning themselves
to soil; a shape that not only does not breathe

but that is choked and empty sharp under
my fingertip, like ideas written on paper
crumpled, thrown aside. I ask
what else could fill
this thirst?

I leave the empty pot on its window sill.

I wonder whether a bird will drop seeds through the screen.

iii.

At the base of my fannypack I keep
a smooth dark nut. It came
from the pavement and before that
a tree. Underneath nickels I finger
its shell. There is a decompression, a cradle
for my thumb. And ridges I worry
weren't there before but are new dents
from the accumulating mass of small things
I deem necessities. A nut's friends
are holey receipts, lip balm caps,
pennies. I cannot imagine this space strapped to my side
without it: emptying the bag's contents,
brushing away the crumbs and dust, setting wallet
to one side next to the mint tin
and pocket of pills. The pile
of unsorted coins that shimmers out, I wait
for the drop
of the nut. Plinks onto carpet
followed by a muted thunk.

flora

nasturtiums

In a cluster they flame. You can eat them. The petals, scraps of silk on your tongue, finish with a peppery twist. Some grow them in backyards next to snap peas, cherry tomatoes, cabbages. They are picked and placed on cakes or salads, I suppose you could put them on your mantelpiece. If that doesn't suit you, honor this sweetly sharp flower by becoming one. Plant your bare feet. At least three inches of soil should cover the tops of your toes. Find someone who reads auras. Practice meditation until your aura burns yellow and orange. It helps if a friend can tend you: watering, weeding around your base, reciting proverbs. Once you have reached a satisfactory spiritual color and insects crawl up your legs, breathe in sharply. Uproot yourself. Shake your arms out like the leaves they are. Your toes may have become spindly in the soil; don't worry—they were keeping you grounded. You may prune them. Enter your home. The air conditioning and electric lights may shock you. This sensation will pass with time. Cover your bed in salad greens. Lay across it.

tulip

The tulip dies with its genitalia disrobed and vulnerable. It starts from a bulb that fits in your palm. Bury it in dirt like a coffin, but not so deep.

It grows a thick green stem topped with a cup of several petals that holds the plant's reproductive parts. One bulb grows one flower.

Once you cut the stem, the flower is yours to care for in a vase or a jar.

Toss it on the ground. Give it to a lover or dying relative. It is your choice.

But once it is cut, the nub of the left over stem will dry and die. This isn't to say that by letting the flower remain in the ground it will live forever.

With time and frost it will die eventually.

pillow

It has a changing grip: loose and encouraging, or tight and needing. Absorbed thoughts, pulled from a restless head, float between the barbs of feathers. It is stained beneath the case; dotted in small islands of dried spittle. In nights when the moon slips through the curtain, the pillow projects the dreamable.

I have been inside one, was pulled in when its grip was particularly unrelenting. And it is both warm and iced over at the same time. It is glass and upholstery. It feels endless in there. There are cruel snarling corners left over from some untamed night terror, but mostly there is a haze that changes how my body feels (I shift from flower-weight to mountain-weight, in and out of vignette vision) and murmurs confusions.

When I did leave it, I did not find the way out, but was thrust into a body that feels like my body. Every time I leave, I return to my room with some part of my mind clinging to the puzzles I had been solving there, or reaching beside me for the person I had seen. After the first few moments, when I realize those are lost to me, I settle, accepting their visitation.

cold hands

They are looking for sleeves or quilts to burrow into. Fire attracts them, they settle in the smoke. They are often found lingering near radiators. When they touch someone else's skin, that someone might express surprise, even pain.

Their strongest emotion is longing. You will find them reaching for other bodies.

They are parasites, robbing comfort from others for their own satisfaction.

It is the backs of them, along the tendons and knuckles, that are most biting.

extinct city

i.

Read the Younger's letter to Tacitus
recounting the bath I took in heat
and ash that reshaped my magnetism,
that paused my age, ended my children's,
left the Elder sprawled out on a ship's sail
in the sand with lungs collapsing
as crystalline matter accumulated
on top of my roof tiles. My children suffocated
in homes like ovens or waited
near the sea for boats already rowing for other coasts
hoping to leave my melting ruins.

Under hills of pumice I cradle the bones
of my children, keep them whole
and sleeping, we go back to the womb
but this time it is arid and smoking. I could rest
like this for millennia, preserved
in settled pieces with volcanic dust as glue.
I could be eternal on Earth; at last a voice
from land communing with the gods
and goddesses. In rest I am most powerful.

But most lonesome. The gods are cold
and make for poor companions, booming

over one another. I miss the soft voices
of my children. Even in the midst of disputes
they crooned in my streets, and funeral rites were soft,
spacious, and brassy; carefully orchestrated
with pungency sent out through my open air
and offered up to the gods. I know now
they plug their nostrils and laugh at the attention
given to death and the inferiors
who suffer through it, fear it, cling to it.

I am an urn in this, my new life.

ii.

I was a body in hibernation until you came
unearthed my children
took them as if you had found them lost,
leaving me gutless
to be a skeleton you pass through,
marveling at how I must have been once
when my children breathed with me.
I still am as I was, only a museum.

You cannot feel empathy with my architecture. Who thinks
“how lonely the tiled baths in the bathhouse
must be, how biting the stone roads’ grief
must be, the walls must pine
moment by moment for their roofs”? You linger
in spots where there was human death and watch
the patches of chamomile in expectation
that their shallow roots will have something to say to you
about life in an extinct place.

Since I have been scraped at and dusted off,
curated and polished, crowds of flora—new
to me and feeding off the earth, mineral-rich
from the underworld’s fires sent into the air

and settling on my grounds—wind up
my spinal architecture, grip between my stones
pulling me closer to the soil. I am exposed
and naked after having been “discovered”
by humans ruled by curiosity. The wind and rain,
the fluctuations in the atmosphere’s temperament—to which
I have been hidden for thousands of years—encircle me,
taunt me until I give under the pressure
of daisies’ roots.

the ring lady

Arches are human: back of head
and spine and a set of dried
and sweeping ribs in a wave
like her dissolved hair. Cradles
the dirt, presses chest into it,
wraps arm around it like a child
in sleep. Fingers seem to be dipped
in two golden rings like a child
wearing her mother's jewelry.
What fit in life is loose on naked bone.
After heat, bones are tea-stained
and empty, even blackened
and burnt in spots. Lower near hip
bones rest a set of earrings
in place of eggs in a womb.
Where the pelvic bone of a lover
might lay, a pair of golden bracelets
intertwine. Are you seeking to be
the protector of your ruby
and emerald, securely encased in gold,
that which you must deem your value?
Yet they remain full of material life.
Or did you expect them to look after you
like the mothers huddled

over their children, imagining themselves
as a blanket, or a soon-to-be
wrapped arms around her stomach;
the fetal bones quickly spilt
beneath her ribs like ceramic trinkets,
unborn but unearthed.

in memory

Pompeii, erotic secrets

playing cards

Portrait of a young girl

3 ring binder

Pompeii HEART

apron

The Last Day of Pompeii

coffee mug

The Ruins of Pompeii Chocolate Covered

Oreo

POMPEII COLLECTION / NIGHTINGALE WITH ROSES

COASTER

Goblet embossed with skeletons holding masks

binder

Souvenir of Pompeii Carved Seashell

Shell

Tile coaster, Pompeii, Italy

with cats

i would like to die by magma consumption

Bury me beneath six feet
of hum. Layer the denser
and deeper. Let resonance
pulsate my bones.
I'll shake off the flesh
inside the newness of death.

In my skeletal afterlife
I step on an eggshell
vast and cracked like a desert.
I am light enough
without muscle and blood
that the membrane suspends me.
I do not splash
into the whites.

The landscape spans out
in all directions
meeting endless horizons,
and the sky of gradient blue
feels weighted and electronic
like a projection. There is a delay
in how the animals call
as if they are enclosed in some container

but the walls are too far to see.

Every sound resides in a cathedral,
reverberating off old stone walls;
even my voice sounds holy.

perspective

I found Pompeii in Williamsburg, Virginia
at seven-years-old. A fiery boat ride,
relief in the final watery plummet.

It was a fantasy-land. All who entered
the collapse escaped
with sopping faces and t-shirt sleeves,

a memory of water.

Photographs of grey masses:
bloated ashen bodies cowering,
a dog, two skeletons in a pit

holding one another, fingerbones
glistening in brilliant rings
surrounded by cakes of volcanic ash.

There are only so many boats,
by the end only sand to lie down on
wheezing through the ash
beside neighbors.

Appreciation fueled by human fascination
with nature's ferocity,
mutual understandings of death,

and tendency for attraction to pain.
In the removal of the seal of silt,
as word of Pompeii,

its corpses, buildings, artifacts spread,
the exposed city
decays with new footsteps

carving paths through the stone roads.
Still, people occupy the space
around Vesuvius

making homes, filling them
with families under the spout
of the mountain. Do they expect

the same fate as the people of Pompeii?
Is this their way of welcoming it?
With an eruption, the surrounding towns

will die, but will not maintain
such a legacy.
Even Herculaneum, the neighbor

of the extinct city often remains neglected,
but in that forgotten state
retains integrity. Those yet to come

will be torn into as soon as the volcanic flows
cease, remnants thrown
into some heap to rot.

s c a p e

go for paradise

Find it less than ideal:

snow covers the sand,
but your father wants to swim
so he pulls you down to the water
“what’s a little snow?”
and dives into what you swear
must be freezing. You make yourself
imagine it is warm
just to keep the image of vacation intact,
to let go of it would leave you vulnerable
to disappointment, would change
what the beach means.

Search for some sort of salvation:

climb the dunes to the stretch
of boardwalk encircling
beachside swimming pools
and hot tubs stagnant and green,
some people with coats and scarves
and sunhats sit at tables on the decks
with striped umbrellas sipping
margaritas and hot coffee.

Weigh:

the snow in one gloved hand,
sand in the other. The gulls
seem to shiver on their own,
they might as well huddle together
like emperor penguins;
you wish you could do the same
but you know the beach is for lazing
on separate towels side by side but never touching,
the only acceptable contact
is sunscreen application.

Decide to:

gather up seashells
stack them together, use snow
for the mortar: a sort of tropical igloo,
dig a moat around to invite
the cold seawater to surround you
and curl up inside the structure
with your beach-read novel
while others sprawl out on their towels
in knit caps and layered socks.

insect timbre

Scurrying in conversation
movements panning
separating in solitary unlit paths,
blending into oneness at some
edge of some wood
or countertop.

An increase in stakes,
billowing intentions
taking on masses
of dust, sweat, poppy seeds.

Lamentations, a howling
in chorus. Moan the burrowing,
call upon fields
and their dwellers. A cohesion
in different voices
and wing patterns.

The settling shimmers
in a blatantly chalky tone.

splinters

How could a thread-like object
embed my skin
like a new bone

in the pad of my foot,
stuck and stunted
for hours until I decide

to brave the metallic digging
for its removal and leave
the foreign piece, this newfound

structural part of me,
in some trashcan
between cotton swabs and tissues.

It took my blood with it
and I remained
the same but with a small

tunnel, a new emptiness
that burrows
and thumps with muted shoots.

If I return to the same
plaything,
will some other piece

reenter the tunnel there,
or will it find
somewhere else? My fingertip?

How can I continue to accept
these sharp entrances
by foreign matter into my body

when their arrivals jolt my bliss
and have me
wincing and bleeding, left with pits

I did not invite. I only hoped
to scoot along the deck
or shuffle through wood chips

or spill onto the pavement.

the trees there were marvelous

I walked along roads for miles from town to town
with some shadow of a person beside me.

Driven by the hunt to end our apprehension over finding the place
that spills and stains all other thoughts in our minds

without knowing the place itself—no image, no name,
no purpose—we kicked at roadside snow mounds with our boots.

I lived inside a ballad, wading
through the shoulders of highway strips

and country roads, walking
through a night that lasted for days.

Only the position and phase of the moon changed
until it shone red and took up half the sky.

We stepped on cobblestones and grassy medians
and grazed our hands along the church's walls.

Inside the meeting hall behind the church's entrance
away from the moon's light

we sat with older women dressed in their Sunday best,
and some weight I didn't know I carried

was lifted by their prayers and instructions.
The demons sharing me with me

must have left and even though I couldn't see it
the moon drained its color and waned.

library

On the shelves of rocks
in the toppling sea,
out past the cluster
of buoys (there
it feels like the center
of some place
or another, although
it's tough to tell where
the middle of the sea lies
when it's always
turning over life
under its tides,
and obscuring its surface
with saturated mixtures
of fog and misted wakes),
mollusks are lined
and stacked like books
waiting to be read over
by some fish
or ship captain.

does alone mean odd?

There is a boy
I see who I
swear is a
ghost.

I see him walk
in front of me.
I blink and
he is

outside on the
other side of
the window
walking

towards me from
a distance. I
have only
seen

him speaking to
himself. Never
to anyone
else.

He averts his eyes
when I smile
at him
or

ask him "Did you
lose something?
A key
or

some person? Can
I help you in
any way?
To

find whatever it is
you may have
lost?" He
goes

on chatting with
his insides,
counting
his

knuckles, goes on
cutting up time
and space
into

indiscernible pieces
leaves me trying
to swim
through

his interdimensional soup.

florida hill

Crushed and crumpled metal:
car doors, highway dividers,
hurricane shutters
peppering retching mountains
entirely grey and black,
colorless in rock, frozen
and woolly. No smooth
resting places, charcoal and biting.

There is a speck of color
under that stack of cinder block:
a nude, armless doll
with a blue ribbon tied
around her waist. And a plastic cosmetics case
cracked on one side. These
are like wildflowers
towards the end of winter.

hollymead off the sunporch

Geese in flight harmonize
their sound
across lake, pond, river.
Some strike

certain ripples against banks
in brighter calls spouting out
when the gaggle's conversation
drones on and rings
in jarring closeness
yet just noticeable atonality.

Rhythmic shifts note warnings
(high winds or predators).

Sonic resolution arises
with the agreement
to change course or to continue on
in spite. Calm
is restored in their calls.

hallo dear cardboard box

Hidden by bed-skirts
with roof settled against the underside of my bed frame
keeping company with pennies and candy wrappers and shadows,
the man who lives inside you
whose face I have never seen
(he comes and goes in the night or when I am away from my room),
who smells of fish, and tobacco smoke, and sometimes
gasoline, I am sure has dressed your walls
in photographs of a woman he loved and still thinks of,
and magazine clippings of dogs in green yards
and models in bikinis. I have not thought
to visit with you when he is gone
as you are his private space, but I know
you are there waiting for him to lay with you.
I see his shadow approaching some nights,
it moves across the wall like a tree.

[proverbs 27:8]
like a bird that flees its nest is anyone who flees from home

Mourning doves' coos
nestle in the crevices of the avenue
and roll around like marbles
inside the hollowed out church:

stone panels resembling walls
hold the packed dirt
under the torn up floorboards,
the dust, the air,

and in the center circular
window frame: a nest,
perhaps a pigeon's, teetering.
Will it fall to the stoop

or to the indented spot
where the holy water font stood?

The congregants who come here
carry bags on each arm, hunch,
push shopping carts filled with blankets,
cans of food, sleeping mats, water jugs.

They want to sound like the birds
that must be worshipping,
but they haven't figured out
how to chirrup and coo like them,

so they pull off their shirts
and walk around with their chests out
whipping the fabric beside them.
They want to sound like flying

instead of footprints in the garden mud
uprooting pansies and snapdragons.

When they sweat, they roll their shirts
into pillows and lay in the dirt
whispering through hymns,
but only soft enough

so as not to overpower the doves.
They take their thumbs dipped
in mud mixed from sweat
and the church's floor,

press them onto one another's foreheads,
dragging the dirt like ash.

[job 7:12]

am I the sea or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard?

I took a ride on a fish
and she said, “my greatest grandma—
my sisters and I called her Moppy—
knew Jonah. He swindled her
into giving him that ride inside her belly.
He knew what he was doing
and where he was going all along,”
she said, “he groaned all night
as he ran his hands along
the soggy tender lining of her belly.

She didn’t like that very much,
felt it was invasive. Wasn’t it already enough
that she had let him ride inside her
for thousands of oceanic miles
with only the promise of God’s blessing
(mind you, a God she did not know
or, frankly, even begin to believe in. What have gods
ever done for whales?) and a biblical mention,
which Jonah admitted to her might not contain
her name.” I readjusted my grip
on the fish’s scales as we weaved between
large rocks and ships.

“After days and nights of endless swimming
she grew tired, tried to slow her pace some
and find a dark pool by a shoal
to rest in for a night. Jonah screamed
at her as he floated in her gastral juices
that he had three days and no more
to reach the coast of Nineveh. He was a tantrum
inside her, refusing to let her rest for even a moment.

She kept on, wondering what God’s blessing
would feel like when she received it. Would it be
warm and safe? Would it be exhilaratingly bright
and blinding? Would it be quiet and smooth?
Would it be fearsome and cold?
In the end she found it to be lonesome and empty,
almost humiliating. She could hear her thoughts
jeering at her, ‘Gods don’t bless fish! Gods don’t bless
whales!’ She was relieved to spew out Jonah.
She hoped the sand was scalding on his naked skin.”

I asked the fish where we were going.
She dodged a motorboat. “I still wonder
if that Jonah didn’t really know how to get her blessed
and only said he did to seem more important
than he was. I think what she felt was deception

from a selfish creature with no respect
for the ocean, other living things, or whatever
god he claimed to worship. He only wanted to save
himself, didn't trust this god of his enough to help him.
He really made a spectacle of it all and dragged
poor Moppy into it. I heard he saved a whole city,
but with the same promise he gave her. Did he really
save those people? Or just seed false blessings?"
I tried to rub her side, to show her some sympathy
or comfort, but I wasn't sure if fish understand
what that touch means. "I would like to be blessed
by God someday."

filling in holes
for Lola

*I am going closer to the river
and I will step in once I'm there with you.*

I am waiting near the bank for your laugh to come stepping behind me
so that we can strap on wheels and find empty housing lots to go racing in.
Once we have worn ourselves out in the Florida heat,
we can sit in the sharp grass under the mango tree
and I'll listen eagerly to your quietude, maybe you'll test the river this time.
And right as you are coming nearer to step in with me, to show me,
your mother slept too long.
So you stayed behind—while I fell asleep by the bank—more awake than ever
waiting for the wrong vision of your mother to appear to you,
the one with her lips painted red
to cover up the blue. The river doesn't miss your knees if it's never felt them,
but I know what your legs look like when they dance along the wall
in the shadows making toe prints on the paint.
I'm waiting to see how they move in these waters.

My ankles are numb from the current that will not stop.

But you are here with me now, though still and quiet as before,
unsure why the river feels harsh in its relentless movement.

The skin around your ankles is raw. You continue to stand grounded
in the muck, stubbornly unmoving. *I am here now, aren't I? I am in it,
and I will stay until the water turns clear and I can see in it myself
and why I am the way I am.* You have looked on at this river

your entire life, always listening, always close,

but to immerse your flesh in its water for nights on end,

you begin to lose feeling in your toes

and your calves tense and twitch. I tell you

that you are not used to how the river feels, you must enter it slowly

at first. Come out. Sit with me and look at it move without you inside it.

Down by the river I could not see to the other bank.

The fog from the valley holds your hand, dissolves it
when you point towards the mountains.

This is a bank on which you have looked many times. You know the rocks by heart
and how your boots sink, and mother held out her hand,
held your hand until you regained balance. There is panic in your voice
at the familiar and what you have long known
to now become hidden by the fog. In it your hand shivers.

What parts of you are turning to fog? Make yourself aware
or the memories you do not practice keeping close with the pattern of recall
will drift into it. The fog from the valley holds your hand,
lets the feeling of your mother's grip
sink into your old footprint.

I don't want to see it, it isn't there. By the river's side you build a wall of stones and driftwood, adding fish bones and snake skins around the edges. At least you've made something you seem to be proud of even as it acts like a sieve sifting out the banal bits of memory from the harsher ones, leaving the soft ones on your side of the wall, staving off the hurt on the other. It makes the view full, what with all the empty water expecting to be understood. You begin to develop your own understanding of how your mother left, how that shapes the past and what you remember. Translucent stones dipped in mud are your favorite building materials. You think you should install a window out of them, perhaps you will want to remember how the water moves at some point. The wind dries them, they turn cloudy and blank. Colored in with debris and idle waste the river is filled in now it seems.

This clutter here is chaos. I must subtract and simplify,
you say as you take down the wall piece by piece, rolling it into the river.
What good is the inanimate to keep me company
and hide what I have known, when the living will not wake up
and hold me? Your concentrated eyes land on protrusions
between cracks in the stones, you knock fists into them,
hope exertion of force will overturn the mass and leave you
in peace. You empty out your space.
There is unity in the ease of nothingness.
When the wall is taken down and the elements burned, still to the ashes you say:
this clutter. By piece and grain
you remove every bit of matter until there is emptiness—
only you and the world's spin
with nothing to contest how you understand yourself.

The riverbank is cruel to me, reminds me too loudly—with the rocks stacked and tumbling from the ebbing waters—of her and what I do not have, do not know now—and fishtails that hit the surface—how it runs fills my ears and belly. You move away because avoidance is easier than confrontation, so that only a faint rumbling of the riverbank is cruel to you, reminds you. You shout at the glint between the trees, I can't hear its mumbling. I can't see it, it isn't there. It never was! until you and what is truth to you unconsciously split from the riverbank. Its cruelty to you reminded you with rocks stacked and tumbling close to your toes that it moves without you, stays as it was even without her. Only a few rocks catch the water here and there where they hadn't before. You are afraid to feel its currents turn your ankles raw again, so you move away from it and any chance to look closely at its depths.

From here it is a patch of silver. Towns away and woods between the water and your own body, you are removed and toy with solitude, sometimes peering out at what shines between the trees deciding it is something new on this side. You give it new names its definition changes. Its body from here is a patch of silver, towns away and woods between. The water and your own body now feel distinct from one another. The water has not changed how it feels it is only your body that feels free in deliberate forgetfulness, a numbness, as you look, drenched in the stillness of the soil, at only a patch of silver. Towns away and woods between the water and your own body is a space you did not know could exist. You begin to worry that it cannot fit inside the familiar confines of a body.

*Where is there a river? I have not heard one
since I went away and found this bodiless space.*

I have tried to draw you toward where I rest, where I am learning
to not fear when others sleep, but you haven't come.

Are you waiting for it to come find you hiding, flood your garden?

Or will the sounds rattle and pierce you?

By the bank, I draw you like a child listening close with her ear to the ground
by railroad tracks. Will you laugh when you hear the river sounds?

Thinking *how silly to be wary of water lapping at logs.*

Or tears come where there is a river.

I have not heard one since I left it behind the trees.

I have tried to draw you swimming in it,

but I do not remember how that would look.

I first need the sounds to come.

It has been long enough away from the waters, hasn't it?

That empty space you cannot visualize—never thought about until now,
now that you have moved far from the water
and forgotten how your reflection shifted
in the changing currents—is pervasive and looming. It blurs the patch
between the trees to oblivion. That space you cannot visualize
never thought about you either until you decided that being near the water
was more painful than being far from it. Then that space recognized the change
in how you breathe as if you could comfortably forget the moment when she died
by measuring distance instead of wading into the center of it all
and piecing it amongst the rest of you. It encircles you,
shows you that you will still remember
with the same weight, until you begin to work with the depths of your loss
and who you were before. But the river feels like your face
when you've been crying.

Into it and drowning, or sailing, or looking on. I would go with you however you choose,
but I cannot let this place hold my ending. I will sit inside some ship's hull
and stay up late with you chatting about ways of coping
like boy-crushes in school. We can paint the changes in our gut like we would our nails,
choosing polish: a tense and twisting green, a hollow deep blue, a resonant plum,
a settling cream. But even as we don camouflage
we cannot let it sit for too long lest it begin to constrict and shut us in
as we spiral through what is or could be lost. Inside this belly
I will not hear myself or you declare: *This is where I will stay,*
this is where I will find my definition. I would go with you
however you choose, but coming and going on our own volition,
respecting its complexity and not spitting at
or praising our reflections in it,
is how I will honor the river.

With hands on my face pressing skin like warm putty,
I am reminded to consider myself
instead of the untouchable un-seeable wisp, the you.
Inside my mind there is a pair of scissors
and a roll of tape, cutting out bits or entire moments
and piecing them together in a way where I can see the seam
but cannot be wholly certain of what was there before. Sometimes I press on my skin
in new ways to see if it will change shape or if I can learn the structure of my skull beneath
by touch; maybe this will give me answers: how it feels
or how I will look when my body turns cold.
What I have learned from this so far is that the act of
looking at paintings of cardinals and the speckled petals of adder's tongue
in my mother's wildlife books
means more to me each time my fingers ride my jawline.

person of the
perpetual present

Shapes on the sofa's print soften into their environment with my passing movement. I am stepping down the hall. Mummy's bowl of cherries is turning to a heap of rot. The cat is waiting for my shoes. The coffee table mimics an old sea ship granulating into the fog as I go along, leave it behind. The rug with its patterns and colors is dizzying, going in and out of focus.

I am time and space. I carry it with me, am dressed in it. Everything either enters my realm—visits for an instant—or leaves. I was in the past once, but I am not sure when. Somehow it hangs in my hair and under my nails. I will not turn around to find out why.

And that is not to say I keep focused on the forward, sending my some-day-to-be corpse hurtling towards the future. No, that dimension further on is like the past. It gets muddled together with thoughts of all tenses. It is best to stay in one tense. No chance for nostalgia, or apprehension. I keep at a moderate pace, paying close attention to my knuckles.

My health does not decline or improve. All pain is extreme as I have nothing to compare it to; it has no endpoint. When I sleep I am no longer alive. When I am awake everything is bright in hue and shakes my eyeballs, I live in oversaturation.

I have never felt longing. I do not feel attachment to anyone or anything. Not even to myself. My body is a vessel to hold the rest of me, and I must maintain it in order to function. I have never thought of a person and missed them or wished they were near again. There is nothing I hope for.

I do not remember much. Not actively, at least. I have a fully functioning memory, but do not spend my time sitting in chairs and looking out windows, thinking back on timelines. My memory serves to remind me of who and how I am now.

I refrain from reminiscing.

I cannot pinpoint moments of change as every moment is changing; it is all new.

Hypotheticals are useless and dangerous. They are traps to leave you thinking in circles, on the search for the cleanest answer. They bring you too deep into the future.

The future is vast. It is possible to get lost there. I have seen it happen to my aunt.

She counts everything. She is always on the edge of one expectation or another, sitting in her armchair, following paths of every choice she could possibly make.

The number of kitchen tiles reminds her she hasn't yet made those choices.

Mountain cliffs are harmless. Equally, a high tower is no more dangerous than your porch.

Ends and heights are not lethal with the removal of hypotheticals. In one singular tense

I climb the mountain, reach the craggy top, approach the cliff, stand planted on its edge and watch a hawk enter my field of vision as it floats over the opposing ridge. I back away and hike down the mountain. Do I return as I had come? I cannot be so sure.

A step from sunlit street into chilled dark. In the cushioned seat of a planetarium, the darkness enters my throat. It paralyzes me. The stars turn on and the voice encircles my head and I move through space with the projections, grazing constellations.

I am light-speed burrowing into eons. The darkness turns off and I fade into light.

A person visible between the lines of past and future.

child

yellow

foxglove

bellwort

amber necklace

tanager

meadowlark

adders tongue

swimsuit

buttercup

goldfinch

daylily

perfume

warbler

orchard oriole

robe

mother

I think there must be a reason I wear so much red, am drawn to the color. It isn't a favorite, only an allurements. The reason is my mother. I keep a photograph beside my mirror: myself, a child sitting next to her on a bench. We are in swimsuits. Hers is yellow.

She occupies cardinals. Binoculars on the sunporch table, birding books stacked with pencil markings and notecards. The state bird where she passed, an ember against the winter. But shouldn't the sight of someone's spirit be rare? This is at least noticeable. Why a male bird? She was not an especially vibrant woman, rather subdued and observing in fact. She does not occupy cardinals. She must be a chickadee or some bird I've never seen.

Red is a protective color; a shield fountaining over my legs or bearing its ferocity on my back or in my shoes. She and I had red in common, in our hair. She must have thought I needed a reminder of my own safekeeping, encouraged me to dress in the color. How she sent that message, I'm not too sure.

fever

This room is a universe-nest with plastic space on the ceiling and cosmic space sifted through the window. Remember back to other rooms when as a child space was even bigger and further than it is now. Walking in a hallway, a cocoon in which you could sleep and grow, you come across corners. A composition of walls and meeting points defined by shadows. Step between them and meet face to face with an expressionless computer screen like an open eye. The blank, gleaming slate is a shock.

Inside your mind is a smooth plane of fine peach sand. You could sink into it. On days when it rains the plane turns to yogurt. The sky screams with television static and sharp prisms refract the light. The particulate rattles the smooth, turns it to granulated shards. Every other moment the landscape settles. A muffled flashing. You fall in and out of calmness, unable to control the vibrations of the scape. It could be endless.

Outside your mind you feel a nausea and find a darkness too thick to see through. The shadows start to granulate, matching the pulse in your mind. Stumbling over ridges in the rug towards sister's bed, you keep your eyes wide. Touch the corner of the pillow. Back in a space that is smaller and closer. A settling.

[job 36:20]

do not long for the night, to drag people away from their homes

A child should not lie out in the snow
at night and look unblinking at the sky
and the bare magnolia branches that black out
some stars and show that there is distance
between here and there, that inescapable vastness.

She should not feel the bleak night
is a place of safeness as it bites at her cheeks. It does not feel
like the church's sanctuary, in which she finds herself
each Sunday, absorbing the warm tones of the wood
and the flickering of the altar candles
and lambent stained glass of the angel Gabriel
appearing to the shepherds. It is hollow in this night

but crisp around the edges. Almost sharp. Nauseating
in the overlapping of the smooth roundness of loneliness
and the harsh granulated cold that burns
like television static. Sleeves and pant legs soaked.

At times, even though the sky is unobscured and clear,
it feels as if pillars of snow are built on top of and around her
extending past the roof of her home. She knows
she can break through, send the snow tumbling

over the roof and into the front yard onto
the dogwood, nude and sturdy.

They are heavy on her chest,
crushing bones and lungs. She might forget
how to push them off, and find herself suffocating
with no one near to come dig her out.
She would rest, a frozen child with ice for eyes
trapped and forgotten in the lonesomeness of death. Hoot

of an owl. A shift in her neck dissolves the pillars,
sends her back to the glazed night, gasping. She recalls
inertia, ascends stairs into a home like a cave
in its collection of shadows reaching for her. One hallway,
a mute stream of yellow light draws her.
Still empty rooms no matter the quality of light
are fallow. A child should not

have to bathe herself to find feeling in fingers
without mother nearby to pour cups of water
on shoulders to rinse off frost and soap. Stand
naked and sopping between bathroom and bedroom. Curl
under thin cotton sheet, feel the open space rush
through ears like sand. But I have seen for her

a festival at the foot of her bed casting flames
of kaleidoscopic color out the window, melting snow. Mother,
father, sister, mother-figure, a boy, motherless friend,
loved ones carrying shields singing and dancing: a jubilee
that fills all corners. The then as if it were now.

there is on my wall

there is on my wall

a photograph of a laughing Inuit pasted over a populated beach

a floating shelf holding a procession of plastic glow-in-the-dark animals
ranging from stingray to elk

condensation from the hot rice pack and the draft coming through the window

a hook to hold the curtain back from the glass for sunlight to come in

encouragements

there is on my wall

a picture of me on the moon

clusters of smudges from prior residents

a massive mirror framed in golden grandeur, too opulent
for my plain morning face. It rests on two stacks of books
because I have a difficult time trusting physics. I feel bad
that I won't be able to read those books until gravity and I
can work out some other deal

more than three spider webs

realizations

there is on my wall

a smaller version of the massive golden mirror

the water pipe through which I hear every faucet. Oceans and brooks intrude
upon my dreams

this silver sheet I found. It's something of a mirror but I have never seen
an understandable image in it

sounds careening and settling

a piece of cellophane that crinkles in the summer when the fan blows

a sheepskin shadow

there is on my wall

 this piece of tape I just left, haven't thought to peel off

 too many mirrors suggesting narcissism, but I like the backwards vision
 of clear in the silver

 a projection of my emotions I expect will sink into the drywall and wooden studs,
 but flashes back at me and blinds me until I accept that those feelings
 need to be sifted through and understood, and that is not my wall's role

doubts

 fur remnants from a depressed and obese cat named Snowball
 who now lives with a small elderly woman. I've been told
 they have a morning routine

there is on my wall

protection and safety no matter the rationale

(in another house) the obtrusive glow of the street lamp

(in that same other house) artistic care from two women leads

(in a different house) too bright paint that somehow felt calming

layered like a coat of yellowish paint, the feeling and reminder
of this temporary space in my life

the breath of a boy who fell asleep over an hour ago
even though Inuk throat singing has been playing for nearly thirty minutes
right by his pillow

there is on my wall

a sort of persistent pressing that finds my chest, reminds me that the people I love
will die and leave me empty and remembering; there is nothing I can do
to stop them from going and I have to decide: do I distance myself now
to lessen the loss? or do I keep them as close as I can before they go?

bite-sized pieces of feelings I forgot to resolve and left hanging there
beneath that floating shelf

a blending between place and space: this is my address,
but it is also where I breathe, find comfort, enter into solitude
or private conversation. I have given it a distinct definition
from the one it held before by its previous inhabitants, but it still stands as it had

a particular point at which I stare when I'm sorting through thoughts

ideas only I see

varying sizes of holes

patience

i.

One of us could move
around the other
in deliberate patterns

on trains to and trains
away, a calculated
number of days

in between each loop
to edge along
the coast of temporary

cohesion and dissolving
separation, a blending
of your “there”

and my “here” into
a practice of location
as inconsequential,

only a coloring
of a few lines of thread.
Then once the other

begins to move
and we are passing
tickets between

our hands, from
mine to yours,
and we trade footsteps

onto platforms for sitting
and waiting the approach
of the whistle—a warm

interruption to the quiet
of winter—and the wheels'
shriek a bit below

the steaming car idling
or the steel bench
under fluorescents,

we progress in
our dizzying weaving
coming together and apart.

ii.

I sit in the same seat
you sat in last month
inside this train car

and there rests that
domelike mountain
you saw and I see

a clay colored dollop
I could swallow,
then maybe I could taste

how you think about
its shape or how
your body rides

the vibratory railroad
but your eyes stay fixed
and steady on the curvature

rising out of the water,
some silent tortoise
keeping our circuitous ideas

packed into the soil.

When it is warm and the trees
grow again, the dome pulsates

in thick greens and I run
my fingers through the image
like I might your hair

but the glare on the window
snags my pinky
so I return my hand to my lap.

iii.

Maintaining our space
within the allotted
square of base muslin

we make use of the borders,
skimming them without
overstepping and fraying

any threads, and when tears
cut through what we've stitched
we go over the spot until

it is filled out and able
to endure the tug of the coming
and going and passing

in and out of cities
and familiar rooms. We sleep less
on arrival and departure

and in the between time
we look at those together moments
as untouchably idyllic,

but the sailing ice on the river
proves expectations
cannot be set so high

and we are left mending.

iv.

Luminous screens have become
our shared room, although
I cannot see you pacing

around in it or resting
on your stomach, or see
your eyelids slowing and swelling

with dense thought.
We are constantly entering
and exiting the textual space,

displaying new collections
of letters, words, pictorial icons
on the walls. The sonic quality

there is a recording
of a somber sparse band
on a roll of tape decaying

into soft echoing static
as it loops, coloring the room
blank and endlessly open.

Somehow there are instances
of clarity and connection
here. I feel your focus.

forgiving

With swollen eyelids
and monotone urgency
unwavering “Caroline”
a cold lull.

At first I thought
his father
must have died.

“I really fucked up”
or he was fired
from his job.

“First, can I
just say?”

I hate this
already;
the only purpose
for prefaces in moments
like these is to stall,
they never lessen
the impact.

“You know, right?
that I would do anything
for you?”

Yes, I do, but
that doesn't mean

I want him to.

“and that I love you
so much?”

He pairs ‘I’m sorry’
with ‘I love you’
a lot of the time—
must see the latter
as a way of doing something
about the former—
and I know that he
feels both. Right now
especially.

“Remember two weeks ago
when I was really upset?”

Did he hurt
somebody?

“I really
fucked up.”

Did he
grab somebody

by the throat?

Did he draw blood?

That seems unlikely

for him, the boy

who was pushed

in the face

and simply
backed away.
“Making eyes at me.”
Okay.
“Followed me
into the bathroom.”
A seductive location,
I’m sure.
“We”
this nameless, faceless,
voiceless woman
and he.
“We hooked up.”
Who came up
with this phrase
and its many variations?
Who allowed it to grow
into ambiguity
so that without
further question
it could be a kiss
on the neck, the cheek,
the lips. It could be
her tongue
counting his teeth
riding his taste buds.

Or he could be
inside her.
Still,
it hit my muscles
so chemically hard
and left me shaking.
He said later
that the visualization
of my hurt
was cartoon,
was so painful to watch
through the screen.

I cannot be sure
he hadn't been crying
all day
since he called me
'til when I picked him up
at the train station
and drove him
to my house
so that I could tell him
I was angry
and he said
"I like that better
than when you're sad

because of your stone
face. You are so
strong.”

I told him alright,
but my forehead
and the bridge
of my nose were sore
from crying
at the imaginary images
he put inside my mind.
I let my face appear
to him as smooth,
collected. But to me
it was a reflection
of my mind:
hardened and calloused,
rough to the touch.

I couldn't be far
from him
for even the night,
and I couldn't
forgive him yet,
only kiss him
and his contorting
face and tears

once or twice.
Because I cannot let go
of the boy
with whom I share
an unnamable level
of clarity
in communication
all because he felt
eighteen again
for a couple minutes
and was transported
to that time,
unconsciously reverted
to that rejected version
of his self in that
urine and whiskey
stained bathroom
half naked and stinking,
forgot his life
had changed since then
and that I was waiting
on the other side
of a train
for him
with a jar
of string and beads

and strips of paper
with handwritten
positive affirmations.

“You’re a blessing.”

He doesn’t believe
in higher powers;
has never believed
in blessings.

“You’re an angel.”

He doesn’t believe
in God, laughs
at his mother
when she tells stories
of how on a beach
in Italy she thought
he, as a newborn baby
lying on a towel
in the sand,
looked like cupid
and would attract
heaven’s angels
who would take him
up in wings
with them to God.
She called him

angel bait.

“You are the strongest
person I have ever
known.”

I have a certain
hardness to me
a certain thick
and impenetrable
layer. I’m not
so afraid.

out of focus

Prayer, silent and built in the mind
remains amoeboid
in its revelatory complexion:

a blush on my mind
darkens into a cranberry
ripens into knowing that song
with frozen strawberries
and finding those intervals into

sex faces, how muscles in the body
tighten and release without guidance

dressed in ripped coat pockets
where the thread must be
into tomorrow's yogurt and honey

that same dish but filled with
a cup of green tea in Florida
near the mermaid themed bar
a few miles from the beach into

wondering about ocean lights
from the shore

then northern dusk icy moss and waterfalls,
that Oaxaca scarf
and later the surrounding plastic tubes

smoke under the stars
gazing at buffalo
into rum and then tequila into

naked with grassy knees by the barn
the stars again

their surrounding darkness
into the separation of soul
from body in death
(the body a shell, an icon of the person)
and where it must settle,

into purple

into thanks.

afterword

Coping is a crucial element in the experience of loss. The ways in which a person approaches loss from the moment leading up to it, to the occurrence, onto the aftermath is singular to each experience. I like to consider each different form of coping as a scape, both in the literal sense that the element of escape is often at the forefront, but also in that the process of coping can span out in varying directions so that it resembles an emotional landscape. Different losses call for different ways of coping. An example of this is “go for paradise” which intends to explore ideals and how if reality’s circumstances do not rise to meet those expectations, one is confronted with how they will approach those lost ideals. Some might cling to their idyllic vision and continue to go about as they might had everything lived up to expectation, implementing the traditions they so wish to be a part of no matter the absurdity of it in context of their actual circumstances, essentially ignoring reality. Others might attempt to combine elements of their ideals with elements of their reality.

I experienced sudden, unexpected loss as a child when my mother died. The main way in which I coped was to escape. I escaped my own memories by subconsciously altering them, cutting out certain moments and details, while simultaneously looking at others more vividly. Dreams served as a way of escaping that loss, as well. They brought the unreal and the real into one hazy reality. I could experience what I lost in life as very much alive in my dreams, or develop an entirely alternate world that was not affected by whether my mom was alive or not—she never existed in these dreamscapes. In waking life there were only two ways for me to preserve these sensations: to prioritize memories of dreams over actual memories involving my mother, and to write. This mixing of memories and dreams has affected the way I remember, even now. There is a certain layer of fog distorting my

memory, allowing some moments to bleed into others. Occasionally, I will remember the details of a dream I've had or a story I've read more vividly than some memories. This often leaves me in a state of forgetfulness, unable to confidently articulate amoeboid ideas that have passed through my mind when I did not have the foresight to write them down.

The ways in which I cope with loss have evolved as I've matured and experienced it in new forms. In some senses I approach new losses with a sense of callousness against intensely negative emotions, which many view as a strength. Because I have a clear low point to which I can compare all other moments of loss, I am able to remind myself that worse has happened. I am seasoned in loss. Out of this I am able to let go of some things, while I cling to others. For instance, I have grown much stronger in my ability to forgive and to be patient with other people, but I am fairly sentimental with some objects. Often in the initial moments, I react more intensely to smaller losses (a lost button, death of a plant, slight change in plans) than to seemingly more important ones.

The series "filling in holes" began as a metaphorical exploration of my relationship with the loss of my mother in comparison to one of my closest friend's loss of her mother. She and I have not had many conversations about our mothers, our grief processes, or our general perspectives on loss, and I wanted this series to serve as imagined interactions between us based within a grounding, but still imagined landscape. Because she and I are not geographically close currently, I wanted the speech from the *you* and slight glimpses of the *you's* reactions to the river to be the only evidence the *I* and the reader have of the *you's* experiences. I tried to exclude as many assumptions from the *I* about the *you* so as to keep the *I's* perspective as observational as possible. However, the *I* has experienced loss before, and has been through the grieving process and has begun to learn how to understand herself in relation to the loss in her life, and is therefore able to impart her

knowledge about how to approach it all onto the *you* who otherwise is figuring it out on her own.

In the end it became clear to me that this series isn't entirely about parsing through loss or grief, but rather understanding one's self in relation to that loss (what you knew about yourself before the loss, how you react to the loss, and how you are different after the loss). The title comes from an article my friend wrote for her college's online newspaper a year after her mother's death, in which she writes about her experience reading her mother's many journals and trying to understand herself, her childhood, her mother, and their relationship all in just a summer's time. The article is entitled "Holes".

The title for this project, "from here it is a patch of silver" is taken from a line in "filling in holes" in which the *you* leaves the river and looks on at it from a distance, and from that distance it no longer holds the form of a river, but rather a patch of silver between the trees. Understanding the river as a patch of silver is a way of distancing one's self from loss, and from self-reflection. Outside the specific context of that series, the phrase also applies to how I often view my memories. When I experienced the original instances they embodied certain attributes, but as I now look on at those memories they tend to look different from how they originally did. Often times they are obscured into an indistinguishable patch of silver.

When I lived in Florida, each day my father and I would drive over the bridge that connected the mainland where we lived to the island where I went to school, and as we reached the pinnacle of the bridge in the distance was a small patch of silver that faded into the trees as we descended: the ocean. Water has always been elemental to my surroundings; I have always found myself close to some body of water. As I wrote this

project near the banks of the Hudson River, sometimes writing on the train that runs along the length of the river from Bard to the city, I couldn't help but let its waters seep into my work. Bodies of water have allowed me to remember certain memories more vividly and with more context. If I remember canoeing across the man-made lake in our backyard in Virginia to go pick berries in a friend's backyard, I know that my mother must have still been alive that summer. If I remember walking around the frozen pond to go sledding with neighbors in mid-February, I know that my mother had just died. The range of depths from body to body, the varying hues of water, the many animals and plants that thrive there, the movement and reflection, all turn my imagination even more than the stars might.