
Senior Projects Spring 2019

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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red sea, yellow earth

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red sea, yellow earth

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

by
Isabella Martínez

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2019

red sea,
yellow earth

isabella martínez

for my mama

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without
do you want to sit on the porch & watch the storm roll in?
en qué brazos
saturn, before she fell
maría, 2017
half
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wind through the wheat
kings
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without tenderness, we are in hell.

-- adrienne rich

when I arrived at bard college four years ago,

I would never have suspected that at the end of my undergraduate career I'd have written "red sea, yellow earth," a collection of poems with such a focus on the natural world; but it was andré breton who wrote: "poetry is made in a bed like love. its rumpled sheets are the dawn of things. poetry is made in the woods." in my writing process I found truth in breton's statement, for although I consider myself to be a city girl through & through & set out to write a city of poems, I found myself in a virtual forest of verses overflowing with purple love, yellow dawn, & an abundance of rumpled sheets.

each of these poems is a retelling of an emotion, an event, a story. the work strives to honor the body, inside & out, by locating the body's tenderness & truth: where softness lies & intersects with other bodies in the natural world. revealing this does not connote a loss of strength; on the contrary, I believe that letting softness into the poem indicates an inner strength & power.

two central questions propelling this work have been: how am I making myself softer? how am I making this world softer? I have come to the realization that, for me, the two are inescapably & necessarily linked. I have tried to uncover the softness that exists around us, a softness ever more frequently violated, & to bring these instances to the page. this year's work has been a search for the aforementioned tenderness & truth, the two qualities I strive to keep present in my mind when considering the poetry of others & when writing my own. through this, I have found the beautiful, & the terribly beautiful, & the terrifyingly beautiful.

I cannot instruct the reader how to read this work. there is no "right" way to read a poem or one fixed interpretation of a poem. the "I" & "you," when they occur in the poem is neither fully myself nor you, the reader; rather the poem welcomes any reader to situate themselves in the verse's landscape. I encourage my readers to listen to the words, to feel the emotion, & to experience the images on the page, & then to listen to your own personal response: on your tongue, in your stomach, lungs, & throat. *that* is where these poems come from.

genesis

levántante

the wind whispers

the first daughter rises
pulls back her shoulders
& there is the poem
bleeding flower
on the tip of her tongue

sunrise

kindling

they began:

stark &

unbroken

two sets of sneakers

burning blacktop

they pin back hair with navy

baseball caps borrowed from

their brothers

wide skies of minnesota

tangerine runs

through their fingers

soaking their sneakers like gasoline

with an accidental strike of a match

two flickering chests light

parallel flashing:

silent.

remember the stretched circles home?

how much love we found

in a bus seat?

how much yellow

in a june afternoon?

the sun's full curves graze the horizon

& there could be a long song

about those kids

those hips

that sky & the lighting

of a young fire

today there is a blanket on top of my house

red owl. its song is long & sad. this will play over & again
anytime you close your eyes

snaggled houndstooth
call off the sparrows
hickory bush & the yellow yarn
(this is not a yellow poem)

this country air thickening & thinning
pinched between shoulder blades
impossible to exhale
streaming sweat
body separating into white smoke
this is how you'll remember me

between the pines
every branch a cool filling
every long cry of the red owl
coursing through the cornhusks
where the grasshoppers sleep
with their small shadows

iron buckle
wire in a field
how much better
how much better it would be
to bleed blackberry blood

today there is a blanket
that muffles all of the noises
tomorrow it will melt & I will go outside

I said god was purple

the sky was purple over the tennis courts, I won that match. I paint my nails purple & laugh that god is in my purple nails. you kiss god who is in my fingers & buy me a purple pen so god is in all of the poems. when we went to the sea I was disappointed because it was green & you always said I would love the water. you licked salt off my shoulder & I realized you were right, maybe god can be green. my sheets are purple & when I wake to the red stains you scrub & scrub & scrub & hang them over the banister & I see god as red. in the car we listen to leon bridges & it is raining & the song is purple & green & red. I see god in the walls of the bus, I see god when I look over your shoulders at our ceiling, I see god in the rings you leave on my breasts, in your hair & gums, under your fingernails & in the spaces between your teeth, in the dry spots on your knees, in all of the verses & crumbling walls & thunderstorms & sunday mornings when the streets are flooded with dandelion seeds. everywhere we have been; everything we have seen.

piña

by april
I learned the
sweet ways to
cut piña which
knife to use
I can cut
the whole head
off
but still not without
hearing your name every cut
every cut
as the juice runs down
runs down my arms

I saw you / I was you

sunday morning / 7am / early two thousands r&b low / in the background / together we kneeled on
the beige carpet / overturning the uneven squares / sixteen cards / one by one / pairs easily stacking in
front of us / chicken & chicken / dog & dog / father & daughter & daughter / & son / eyes & nostrils /
& the bottom lip / & the way he cracks his little finger / / this morning I face the streets / still
familiar / a streaming city / I turn / barely anything behind me at all / nothing but a childhood /
scanning for the pairs / I find my own two bruised hands / matching / loaded / yours / my father's

like weeds in the windowbox

we get home & I'm handed
two plantains

pluck three reds
dried in the windowbox
"NO" "too spicy"

boots dripping in the doorway
clamoring banister in a blaze he's gone

steamed kitchen with the
smudged windowpane
scarred cuttingboard
I slice the thick skin but
it's still hard underneath
young green splinters
pierce my ripe fingerflesh

replace the pane replace
the blackened tin foil
empty the cafetera
fresh grounds in the cupboard
yellow can (cut me open
do I not bleed bustelo?)
thaw the yuca
thaw the chicken
crushed garlic red beans ginger chunks of sweet
potato purple cabbage onion! oregano! ricericericerice
no reds

after dinner leave the plates
the pots "to soak"

call him over measure spine against
cherrywood "NO" (I say)
"too big" move the mirror

up four inches

in a blaze

clamoring banister

up & up again

shouldn't be able to hear all that
way down here

for william

I can make half a loon call with my hands

blue heron
weak in the mud
green bottle pieces dug up
heavy jean bottom
waterlogged
tall weeds stringy chewed
loosening cattail clouds
bad nettle
jump over the trench
stepping high, bare
shake out the canoe
can't be scared of spiders
slick stones drip
under the bridge
damp on the neck
glide
through the brief cool air
sit back cupping palms like this:
blow
& wait for the stone's reply

for pete

how it feels to watch a wave collapse

it was once like this:
small green flowers floating on the water
waves that knew just how to hold a body
the biggest sky you ever saw

& on the other side of the world,
it began to rain

the wave fell & broke
baby blue shards we grew up in
shattering, scattering
travelling forever in the wrong direction
through a twisting black heaven
a sky so hot
the spaces spread & spread

she left this sea
& when she left this sea
she found a bigger sea

Nightshift

she describes where the fawn died near the intersection where county d branches into four lanes, the stretch between strip mall & suburb, before the train tracks. she describes the mother: her bounding knees, spine rounding & arching as she surges helplessly back & forth over the border between the forest & where the asphalt carves through the trees like an open wound, back & forth. she describes looking back, & I can see her eyes, blurred, witnessing the beginning of a death, the dead thing still breathing, still batting its wide eyelids, dragging the trailing leg, straining its head towards the mother. I see her hands, gripping the steering wheel, sore from handling rough denim, her drooped eyes registering the sunrise, the skidmarks, the defroster dissipating clouds from her own warm breath. I see the way she closed the car door, softly, her ankles wetting as she trampled the yard's muddy weeds, heads bent as they wept with the weight of morning dew. she locked the door, washed her face, came back to bed.

October

it's not mango season anymore,
& we've stopped making love
in the afternoons

in the mornings the trees hang heavy
crowded with green oranges
small as a closed mouth

I roll limes between the palms of my hands
squeeze & release
pierce the rind

with my fingernail
nectar bites into my flesh
& the grapefruits in the yucatán sting with

desperate amber
flushed halfmoon
quartered, lingering

on her neck
running down
my mouth & chin

nothing is better than her,
looking down,
holding my hair

than those bitter juices
those sharp mornings
that citrus love

as flower, as song

as the rain came gently
from the heavens
so we came

as the monarch moves freely
over lands & borders
so we move

as the dahlia tenderly holds
her dearest petals
so we hold each other

as the eagle rises
to greet the mountain air
so we rise

for saul

loyalist

strange how the
 same sun
shining softly on one's shoulders
 can stun
blind & burn
with a slight shift,
 a shrug,
 in the way she lets
 her hair fall
when she sets
sleep pins down my hands
& I accept this
 lack of control
 as we accept the rain,
 the late train,
the dog barking in the night.

open your mouth & the snow falls in

old room with the
oak cabinets, radiator hiss
rusty red bedframe
& the flannel sheets
the bed with our small shoulders
small breaths like flowerpetals
hold
this
position
for
as
long
as
you
can

flushed mouths, full
steam under the palms
thumb's skin soft like cottonwood
snow gathers in the windowbox
buries the late irises up to their necks
snow silences the whole block
still can't find the right radio station
the hours bleeding like fruit
draining into each other
it's time to go now
tomorrow the curbs
will be gray with slush
so take it all in
fill it all up
make room
kiss both thighs before you go

*I called softly so you could choose
not to answer—then called again.
-- rita dove*

dear god please let my dreams be blue

everything necessary can be seen
from this bedroom window
from the three panes
where dust lodges itself
where the spider sits
stranded in a cool corner

morning rises with its slight yellows
& fawn breath
out there is our tree
the one we seeded
in a bluing cloud
where we spun our future,
roots dangling into the small yard

afraid to blink I watch
morning curl into afternoon
serrated leaves bud from branches
growing gingerly & deliberately:
dogwood, lilac, magnolia,
one form out of another

while she sleeps I run my fingers against
the crude cedar of the windowframe
the jagged grain tugs my skin on the way up
smooths it on the way down

everything important can be held
in this bed
I lie & count the leaves on her arm
count the breaths, little prayers

count the slipping years
as a measure of faith

the sky flows indigo & fingers of frost
steadily spread across the glass
I see a line of low branches
dropping dead things
important things that took so long to grow
the branches are exhausted

I count this loss as another of the world's injustices
like the shrinking of perennials in winter
or that some have a better memory than others

the last crisp leaves, finished, flutter down
their spines curve against the frozen earth
the spider's legs all dried up
window misted white
opaque with a cloud's last breath
I fall asleep making inadequate prayers
reminding myself to write it all down

when sky's last blues slip away
when the rains come
when she wakes
from the dreams that shock me upright
I will tell her to go back to sleep
& she will

songs 1&2

1.

the sweet / milk runs / down down / just so

between where the
open hand presses
flat flat where the
warm swells there
that's where that's
supposed to be

2.

a spider / crawling / all stems / splintered hair / these sheets are / so wrinkled

the song stops
there I messed
up messed up
mouth full of
that terrible
breathing

after monica youn

these hollow roots

body

inside:

white flash	(bites through high mist
twisting red	(gathering of glazed liquid
a swallowing	(eternal cycle of rising & falling
chokeberry	(face of moss
damp smoke	(mountainash
thin vessel	(veins rooted in cirrus
an eternal falling	(rising
wings folding	(tattered
pool of fog	(wet pulsing
over the edges	(rain through pine
blue marbled bark	(swarming silver
veined like leaf	(emptied
silver sap	(drained
white-throated swallow	(opalescent
eternal thunder	(swallowing cloud
knotted bluegray	(swallowing smoke
thickness	(possible
an impossible thickness	(

outside:

black sunrise	
destinal stream	(distream
petrified branches	(well positioned
singed strips	(frozen in their decay
brown blotting	(meaning: rust
rusting runoff	(overland flow
sliced layers	(slick on the surface
splintering light	(sinking into
meaning: blood	(over the edges
cupped palms	(full of bees
shimmer	(shiver
mahogany split	(base of the skull
heaving chestnut	(leaves swept into tight piles
blinking walnut	(swollen
flood down the middle	(speckled thighbone
brimming river of salt	(speckled cheekbone
red ridges	(meaning: divide
meaning: stream	(blood erosion
all at once	(deception
the bee bites	(the other bee
	(black sunset

I loved a girl named delilah

& she smelled like wet wood
tasted like bitter violets
boiled down
knot of switchgrass in my arms

she covered the kitchen walls
with mint leaves
baked sweet breads
made pebbles of my boulders
emptied the old hollows of their red
filling them with purples

when we kissed it was lilac
crushed lilac in the mouth,
mostly.

I unwound my fists
unrolled my barbed shoulders
unravelling seven braids
let their weight fall into her arms
let her run her hands through
like wind through redwood,
open palm.

but I opened the oven
too soon
& the bread fell

now I wake
to boxsprings cutting their spirals
into my softening spine
with muscles melting
blood thinning
half a breath

I stretch a heavy arm

only to find my locks,
shorn,
limp in the empty curve of her pillow

morning turns to morning turns to
morning & I learn
how much easier it is
to cut than grow
 how good it would be
 to stay

bluebird makes a red egg

eggshell, membrane,
damp blue feather,
fallenfeather, dirty. don't touch.

mother lifts the baby to see:
icewave, windwave, wavefeather,
icewing, split.

split shell falling into
little earth. hard as grain.
baby has a red cry,

hard as grain. fringed wing,
oregano, oregano in the the nest.
red nest, lift the baby into the nest,

icicle. baby too big, burst shell, sliding,
mother's arms hard as grain, chickweed grows
between the feathers.

featherfooted baby.
windfeet, babyblood,
iceblood, torn.

abandon

the daughters are born, bundled,
bedded in rockweed

swaying to the steady song of moon against wave
against wave against silver

they weave through deep sea tangles
with scales & spines

thick foam swelling in each throat
call that a love song

fiercely, the current grips their bodies
her love like a steel net,

but a wave cannot be a bed

a frost extends over the surface
bleeding black into green

whitecaps begin to set,
the sea frozen in her curls

thrashing through the crust
twisting crests crack

the daughters drag themselves
released from the surf's grip

towards the shallow pools
unwillingly left behind

they spit kelp, break fingernails
ripping barnacles from fins

black foam rushes from deep in their heaving chests

up through razor teeth

swallowing stomachfulls of air
lungs open, unleashing a wet shrieking

shoulders to the sky
they trade moon for sun,

grow slick, smooth limbs,
shed their gulfweed

they sigh & rest their heads
on the dry shore

the tide recedes

holy spirit

the serpent

to be pure
scaled obsidian
nothing but
one long, smooth muscle

to bask naked
with the sun on my back
eat, easily
& know that this body
untouched
will be waiting here for me
tomorrow

to bite
sweet venom
running down my throat
to feel the dead parts of myself
fall away
to leave them behind

the dove

life dedicated
to clutching a dry branch
to my pearled breast
hovering over a stained sea
no land in sight

devoted to stripping the oils
from my feathers
from everyone's feathers
neck straining
beak smelling
of death
of duty

she opens

the red stream follows ridges cut just for it carved into the sediment by its own body its body frothing holding a host of other bodies & not just stone & sand it has eggs & blood & brine & is full of heat & noises which could be understood as songs why doesn't the stream run out? the rain comes when the rain comes the stream swells widens its body it loves it rushing surging it wants to run to run over the ridges it is full & red & so alive

away, away, away, away, away, away
away, away, away, away, away
-- solange knowles

there she goes

with a terrible crack
terrific widening
cardinal redburst in the eye
the sky inhales its clouds
mouth smoking
syllables pulling themselves backwards
sucking
a sucking sound

nearby:
two birds
brutally black
flung apart by raw winds
falling apart
falling together

no wings today
the bed is red & full of salt
salt, pine needles, ink
bare leafbones
fragile muscle
with the small beating
veins tattered
stripped
snap one open &:
no blood

no wings today
just a hollowed mouth

emptied of sound
a sparrow
trapped murmur
inside of a wet throat

brine from
the sky
blood in soil
overflow
all of this
the roots absorb
in spring

heart/ache

cannonmouth / firewound / tonguesalt / shouldersalt / peeling porch paint / windcheek / windmouth / mountain (of course, mountain) / firemouth / coalsweat / knot in the belly of the sky / above ground / riverlip / stonelip / peeling bark on the hickory tree / eyesalt / eyesalt / stoneshoulder / mouth of bees / redburst / where to sleep now / redroom / stone / river

rewind

no new layers
no more seasons
I behold the nest & gently
bed the birds in their eggs
seal the cracks with yesterdays
gather the grown leaves fringed
with frost, rusted,
tattered in the wilting light
glue them back onto the branches
scrape through ring
after crimson ring of the willow
until she is no longer weeping
until the trunk is rightly whittled
down to its green core
I sand the edges
babysmooth
wrap my hands around it
to keep the bark soft
clear away ages of moss until
only the young buds remain
fresh stretch of history
exposed to the buzzing afternoon

preserve

I fight the wound
I fight for the wound
to keep the river running
keep it from drying
scabbing over
into a common scar
I imagine the song as red
& struggle to keep
the notes in my mouth
trap the scales
in my warm throat
don't let me swallow
don't let it leak
don't let me forget
those good mornings
don't let me forget
what our sun looked like
on the other side of the sky

the youngest swan

I enter the car / the last car / there is a boy / crouching / he hovers / just a skinny boy with skinny wings / umberskinned with / frail feathers / dustywhite spattered / drooping scarcely brushing the floor / umberboy / he hovers / in the shivery light / jaundiced fluorescent / one shoulder against the train wall against / an mta advertisement / the mta is "fixing / & fortifying" / when he sees me seeing / he says I can't sleep I can't / sleep / my wings are hurting / I am trying to find my brothers / my brothers / bits of his shirt are crumbling / falling / off from the elbows / brittle clusters / landing / on the sticky floor / underneath his feet / I am afraid to look / at his small / bare feet / I will wait for the last stop / he says / & then I will find my brothers / he lifts his arms / stiffly / pushing away his curls / tight black curls / he's blistered / under his arms / copper sores all along / lighter than the rest / from shoulder to rib / copperboy / I try to leave (he says) / they won't let me / they said I don't have enough / enough of what / just enough / I'll go back at the last stop / at the last stop I'll have to / go back / without enough / my big sister made me this shirt / scraps of down / barbs of feathers / barbs of nettle / fall / gather under his feet / exposing the wing's bone / sharp bone twisting through shoulderseams / she knit it / it hurts / I can't sleep / where did you fall from / he asks / from how far up / did you fall / small feet / black curls / tight scars / "my sister" / "my brothers"

a lung for emma

my hands are humming into the morning air
there is a rush of salt to my veins
& torrents of raw water spinning
down the side of a thigh
a grey egret takes flight
through fog over water

we've been eating watercress for sixty days
filled with the empty crunching of membrane & vegetable
the waterlilies on your tongue taste like river
river spinning over the edges of bark
cedar, birch, stonegray elm:
my hands have moved wood
& with them I am afraid to touch you

have you ever kissed a girl
without using your hands?
this moment will leave the branches aching
leave the roots trembling one inch below
leave the exhalation of damp smoke
sinking into roots over & again
until their hollows are filled

yesterday we hung our noon bedsheets
this morning they withered into strips of cotton
bloodied with blue air
turning & turning over the garden's dew

i. outset

twelve
speckled
bones
braided
into each
other padded
with sweet
flesh believe
them when
they tell you
it will smell
this good

ii. things they don't tell you

that the rib
can be taken back

icarus woman flies

*if icarus were a woman
she wouldn't have flown so high*

icarus woman flies

those dark years.

she would have used those dark years
to study the stars,
time the sun's movement across the sky,
monitor the sea in the morning:
indigo, then deeper indigo,
then white.

in all those empty hours,
she would have double checked the wax.

she would have forged a beak,
learned the dance of the wind,
found a flock of northern gannets,
mastered their song;
so that together they could dive,
so that she could move freely,
so that she could feel the sea,
the sky

icarus woman stays

honor the hands which feed you
& the ones which deny
for these are identical

a man with rough palms must be safer
than the sharpness of sea
the heat from his hands surely cooler
than that of the beating sun

honor these wings
blooming red
but which surely could never
hold her weight
& her feet
never leave
the windowsill

she
 steps
 down

she plucks her feathers
to make her bed

icarus woman sleeps

icarus woman closes her wings
icarus woman sleeps in her shallow nest
in the sweet dream, she never wakes
 there is no sunrise
there is no sun

icarus woman wakes

in the arms of her own aching,
holding her like a ruthless lover
unyielding, here
to stay

icarus woman asks

where did you come from / who put you here / where do you sleep / where do you think you're going
/ what is that growing in your windowsill / what do you dream / what time is it / what day is it /
should you go / what blooms today / should you do it / with what to feed the flowers / will he find out
/ what time is it / have you gone / are you coming back / will he find you / do you see those colors / do
you feel that wind / is it low enough / what does it sound like / is it cool enough / is there anything to
drink / is there any place to rest / why are you crying / what do you see / from what bird

did you cut these wings?

icarus woman falls

here: closes.
allows every limb, limp
to collapse,
curves those great wings
upon herself

first: body.
lips still with silence
song sealed forever in the throat
those terrible feathers shattering
upon the sheet of sea
& then,
 the ashes

icarus woman sacrifices

in a dim room
bloodied hands slice
through stolen feathers
secure them to her human shoulders
desperate fingers silence
a great beating
a fluttering heart
& the burning wax hardens

icarus woman comes back

one day & one night,
sheets of rain,
& no land.

no ship,
no log upon which to rest,
the vast, splintering sea
numbing her ankles

she turns,
bleeding feathers,
waterlogged,
exhausted

return: one day & one night;
she sights soft light from
the only window
in this side of the world

the rain stops in the early morning
sun opening that long wailing

icarus woman lands

icarus woman lands

icarus woman

lands

icarus woman prays

she lies, floating next to god
as if she were a lover
praying that in the next life
she will be born a bird
surrounded by other birds
& know all the ways they love her.

red sea

without

nights are spent
denying the sharp appetite
burning behind my ribs

hunger is a sharpened bone, loose in the palm
a spiked thing to make my hand feel
small & soft

an old name twists itself around my lungs
thorns my throat
pricks of red
useless, down to the knuckle

hunger is a metaphor
which is to say,
it is not hunger.

the name is so fragile
I touch it once
& it falls to dust

being human is to feel the empty
being woman is to fill it

I cry red into the dust
slice my side,
still no seawater

the rain stops at dawn
leaving behind a thin mist
one day becomes another:
the same water
embracing the same stone

flattened, I lower my lips to the swelling river,
drink & drink.

*all that you have
all that you have
all that you have
is your soul
-- tracy chapman*

do you want to sit on the porch & watch the storm roll in?

the earth is yellow & green. she comes smelling of lilacs & garlic. cry on the porch swing. it's unnatural to do things that hurt, she says. the water is green & so soft. I mean. soft red moss. red sand on the banks of a hot river. air so heavy it peels the porch paint. trying to get a handle on it. hold the darkness. she falls asleep with mango on her lips. pull hair over eyes, darken dreams. dreams the color of thunderstorms. thunderstorms. take me home, she says. lake street. please, she says, take me home. we used to sleep through them all, that one song on repeat all night long. there was a hurricane there, red sea. it smelled like heaven. cielo verde. play it over again. mi cielo, dormilona. make it new. I mean. red rain into empty sea.

en qué brazos

dónde duermes
ahora dónde
duermes ahora
dónde duermes
ahora dónde
duermes ahora
dónde

**saturn,
before she fell**

red trim along the windowglass
blow on your fingers
before you come to bed
our bodies orbit
around the blazing center of tonight
we are two mirrors melted
to a single silver pool
liquid glass sharing a reflection
our mouths are molten
obsidian rivers running into each other
glossed ripples flecked with gold
saturn's impossible rings,
enduring revolving
magma roiling at the core
flooding the central chambers
cooling into crystal
I am crystal
ebony embers black quartz
volcanic ash brimming with smoke
I am burnt where she has touched me
& she has touched me everywhere

maría, 2017

sky hurdles switches sides
no choice bowing flung shatter
pray down against machine discarded
will have to re-do re-claim drowning
in itself a dark dark room
waiting in itself lead sea
doesn't know care outside
someone worked hard on that
outside sea ripping earth from earth

half

when are you allowed to claim a blood
when it's only a percentage of your blood
when the first blood that loved you isn't the blood you love
when the first blood that loved you doesn't have the blood you love
when your first language doesn't come from the blood you love
when you have to learn the language your blood speaks
when you sometimes forget the names that your own blood never forgot
when the blood you love has been hurt by your other blood
when the blood you love is drowning in your other blood
when your other blood is drowning the blood you love
when the only blood your blood comes from decides to leave
when it dies
when it lives across the country
when it lives across the sea

for hana

even the strongest silk

on the last night I turned into a spider
& slept in the hexagons of her hair
spinning an impossible web in my dreams
moonlight between my legs

in the morning she unwound herself
brushed my body back into the bed
where I scrambled, sinking,
stranded in starched sheets
layered like a rough sea

I stayed coiled until dusk
when I crawled to the window
observing the frantic bats
flinging themselves through the mist
deep in their urgent work
to swallow the night whole

wind through the wheat

rain over the wheat
soil between the wheat
earth cradling the wheat
spiders sleep in the wheat
stars burn over the wheat
stream flows through the wheat
no rain, today
sun dries the wheat
sun beating down on the wheat
dust blows up from the wheat
bird forces open the wheat
worms struggle through the wheat
bird frays its feathers opening the wheat
heavy clouds surround the wheat
mud collects between the wheat
bricks stack between the wheat
buildings rise through the wheat
cities spread through the wheat
rain, hard
lighting hits the wheat
thunder shakes the wheat
wheat smokes
wheat burns
wheat collapses
red wheat
blood harvest

kings

in the wet morning heat
gulls circle the beached carcass
opening & closing their claws
extending their necks as they
dive & dig their beaks into the belly

within hours the flesh is stripped
eyesockets emptied
collapsed fin
& two thin ribs exposed to the white sun

the birds perch, bowing their necks,
throats throbbing with blood
until they are startled by two boys on a bike
curls flowing in the wind
pedaling upright
through the edge of the sea

new nest, below ground

when she leaves I dig a hole
in the bedroom floor
empty myself into it
fold into a new womb
a perfect hollow which fits
a perfect hollow

I lie & wait for somebody
& without my having to ask
the somebodies come

the red birds I love
carry away my roof
lift my body
lay me on a bed
of their own down
where I sleep between their wings

where I can build up this bird heart
small boned muscle
no time to waste
I wipe my face of its feathers
walk home on my own flat feet

after all these dreadful miles
my legs are growing stronger &
I can't stop touching them

*for evelyn
& my other red birds*

this is what I mean when I sing about lions

I am the slit in a clean petal of an orchid, a neat severing. I am a lit match, burning from top down. I am the matchbook strip; a striking surface. I am tight coffee grounds. I am the burnt bottom of the cafeteria. I am rusted tapwater running in reverse. I am running in reverse. I am a pot full of rice. I am a grain of rice embedded in the knee. I must be the knee. I am sharpened stone against sandpaper. I am old enough to hold that sharpened stone & know what it can do. I am a sting on the wrist. I am pale lavender without a scent. I am gold going green. this is my body. I am a singing wheel over sharp fog. this is all of my body. I am a blizzard from the ground up. I am the antelope turning from the lion. a stinging wind; the hunt. I am a hunger. a bookcase filled with knives. a blade of grass. the clean moon. the setting sun, smiting the sea.

exodus

it has been seven months
& I rest temporarily
at the edge of this bloodless sky
—*this cannot be hesitation*

I press my calloused soles
into the last grains of our sand
this is the destination you fought for—
pause after the carrying the steadily swelling
weight of the thousands of minutes
how many months?

here is the end of an escape
from one set of hands
to another
the exchange of desert for sea
legs for
stronger legs

the edge of the water:
a thrashing mirror
at first contact one half repelled from the other
two bodies churn away from each other
an immediate chasm opening
the soles of my feet remember the pulsing
of our ocean which was one, once
in all of its tangles & glory

day breaks
I walk into the red sea,
god's name on my tongue

remnants

/ **restos de amor**

in the poems
they're all there:
emma &
littler emma
saturn & her rings,
 you know.

it was once like this:
small green flowers on the water
waterlilies on the tongue
small breaths like flowerpetals
the water was green & so soft. I mean.
rain falling at dawn
 a bluing cloud
where we spun our future,
a purple god over the tennis courts
 & all the yellows
 of a june afternoon

in our first cathedral
she painted us gold
uncloaked
in purposeful pilgrimage from sea to sky
I thought her prophet

I inked crowns & feathers
into the center of the poems
onto napkins
onto brown bags
& she folded my handwriting
into a cigar box

we slept in our first garden
where we dropped our first fruits
two trees, in all of our tangles

growing around barbed wire
reaching for the sun

but it's not mango season anymore,
& I struggle through the open air
knowing her less outside the walls of our garden
here where the trees hang heavy
crowded with green oranges
small as a closed mouth

recuerda

the wind whispers but
the trees don't speak spanish

she smells like [REDACTED] now

her hair is [REDACTED]

we [REDACTED]

yes, we did.

saturn holds bees to the pads of her palms
peels away her rings

nunca podíamos hablar en español juntas
sin vergüenza
only in the writing
in the letters on a bag
in a box, in a box
in the closet

un corte, limón verde
las abejas negras

se [REDACTED] jasmina ahora

[REDACTED] tan largo, no se

[REDACTED]
sí, we did

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