

Legend Of—
A Collection of Poems

by

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I. Dressed as Pretend

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality

I don't want to have skin // touch skin // always // looking at someone else's hand // wanting to outplay them // wanting a forest // beyond this one // one where my body hasn't changed // the winds // beyond recognition // where the earth stops // It's a place // I am getting to // but the map never // outlines clearly // what I am // If it does // it ceases to *be* a map // is now // the thing itself // I want to see // just myself for once // with no overlapping // other

(In)corporation

Cellularity makes equals of us all.
—Fady Joudah

The body then, is a joke. Boundaried skin
is the laugh, single consciousness, the punchline.

Knock knock! Who's There?
The crushed leaves you left in your pockets.

The food crusted under the baby's lip, some on my pants,
calling for so much attention today. Don't be shy,

the shit I wiped from the walls is me, of course it's me too.
My baby was my body once, congregation

of pistachios and vanilla ice cream I ate all summer long.
My organs huffed in a horse race to accommodate her,

and she grew inside my uterus like a bright and waving flag.
Even as I care for this animal body, with all its surfaces,

nothing ever forms me: I am already made.

Borges Sonnet

I feel caffeinated. Fucking frustrated.
Time is slipping. My phone screeches a warning:
sandstorm coming. Visibility will
be low. When Borges got to the Sahara
he observed that by touching the sand
he modified the desert. Indelibly
changed it forever. I wish I felt
productive. I know his point was subtle,
but was it colored by masculinity,
by his ability to understand
himself as maker of reality
rather than made? My question though, is not:
am I the fingers, or the sand,
or the alarm? Where am I in this image.

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality: Jaguar

In my next life // I want to come back as a jaguar // and maul a man // for sport // This may not take my next life // Everyone will think how beautiful // dangerous // I am // Witches will pray to me // and take my movements // as omens // I will come to myself // in a dream and drink me // in the mirror // muscular water // rippling // frightening focused eyes // telling myself *don't stop // tear until there's nothing left*

Looking at someone else's hand // as a jaguar // I maul a man // Everyone will think how dangerous // Never have the map // Witches pray // my omen // The thing I want to see // in a dream // is me // singing *I am something new // I am something new // I am something new*

Value

I had migraines in the night—tension and splitting, hot chest,
red palms—thoughts crashed together in a chemical clangor.

The next day I smelled broccoli beginning to rot,
wondered about ants wiggling on the kitchen floor,

tasted the burn of a ripe peach on the buds
of my tongue. Placed my foot atop my beloved's.

I don't like to be touched.
It's always been a problem.

I hold my daughter on days when I can.
I kiss her face or feet if she lets me.

I don't want her to grow up with my problems but to do that
I have to overcome so much of what I think of as myself.

A lonely creature and her shadow make so many limbs at certain times of day.
I find it hard to believe I have value, apart from the things I've made.

Of the pictures on my altar,

one is my niñera in the room she kept during the week.
Her name was Candelaria—she let me call her Candy.
In the picture my pinafore mimics her apron,
my brother's unfolded laundry on the bed.

Candy pulled my hair into pigtails slicked
tight as horse hooves, bolitos down the back.
She cared enough about me to do that.
I don't know why. I thought of her as family.

I never met any of her children.
We spoke in Spanish on the walk to school and back.
All the adults say I was fluent then.
In the photo nothing colors her gray hair,
and her meaty hand holds me to her side.
Square plastic frames flash a glare in her eyes.

Axis

The dogs bark into the night.

We hate the fucking *campo*.

The hawk cries above the house and we search the trees to find it.

It looks back at us for prey.

I say nothing while people talk around me.

I seem simple, but I am racing.

The plane lands and I step onto the tarmac, an orange peel in my pocket.

If I drop it in the dark soil, there an orange tree will grow.

Luciernagas for the first time. Tarantula in my suitcase.

The dogs are filthy and bathe in the river.

I heard a second hand story from my father.

He said my mother's cousin was drunk and whispering into the ears of women.

A joke that depended on a maid raped repeatedly.

Instead of nothing, I said I don't understand.

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality: Dressed As Pretend

a water park with only little girls // little girls // all color // no mothers // play in water // swim
 and then together jump in // like flying // hovering high above // drop in // holding each other //
 arms linked // even a small baby // safe // afraid of being overcome // by murky and rushing work
 // we girls // backs to each other // rotate slowly towards an edge // so as not to leave ourselves //
 unprotected // when we reach // we grab hold and scramble // we run // a monster gives chase // it
 is a stingray // floating // flying // in a moment of objection I say *kill it—kill the thing that's after*
us // I have a knife in my hand and I slash it // I cut the shape of a cross then an x

trapped creature inert
 dressed as pretend // civilized
 it was after us wasn't it

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality: Looking

into a cardboard box // the kind that holds popsicles // the manufactured tastes I thought I had // looking through it into a neighborhood // wanting a particular home // seeking a particular couple // keep asking around // see people on the street // ask *do you know where the [] are? which one is their home?* // a neighbor points // says they look like this: // every boss I ever had // they were actors // a masc with glasses, black, square // and the actress always playing white people's mothers //

this is about trying to leave the law: // *This dream came after I asked the dream maker // how to leave the office // for help in leaving the office // or why I haven't left* // I find it interesting that the poem should be contextualized // working at the Public Defender's office // trying to leave the law altogether // I wonder how to translate that significance to others // I can see why the dream meanders and stays lost // now that I realize what it was about //

through a house // through the yard // to the back // leads out to a boardwalk, but // the water underneath is missing // busy busy busy with people // wandering // see the couple // through the window of a restaurant // fixate // stop for Fame's mask // lean down // say something about celebrity // laugh smile // the top of a penis pokes out of the waistband of Fame's pants // recoil // withdraw on one level // but on a performative level // act like nothing is wrong // don't want him to know // don't want that to be the case // don't want to embarrass him // can't hold any more disgust //

while awake I ask what is the significance of trophies // is there one object // to name the choice to leave the office // a finality I do not recognize until I look back? // that office was sexist // I mean all offices were sexist // homophobic // racist places // but the head of the PD's office when I started was a man named Phil Kohn // a total creepo // someone later driven out because allegations of sexual harassment surfaced against him //

further from the goal // I walk into a store // a trophy shop // ask if they have one // the shopkeeper says no // I struggle to get back // *trophy* // originally from the Greek // meaning to turn // then a route // then a prize //

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality: Before

Before new blood there was the old blood in flakes on my thighs // before that I watched *Don't Worry Darling* to escape backwards into a fake community // very similar to Vegas during atomic testing days, circa 1950s-60s // men bought into it and drugged their female partners into participating // I think the moral of the movie is: if every husband is responsible for his wife then every wife is responsible for killing her husband // before that none of the white people in the room knew Freddie Prinze Jr. was and is Latino // they questioned his passing use of Spanish and I cringed // noted his father was the star of *Chico and the Man* // before that we drove to Walgreens me and the baby // I asked for Plan B // June asked for noise makers // before that I woke up in the middle of the night at 3 am for four days // before that I dreamt an insect crawled in my hair // maybe just a nuisance but everything is threatening // it slid closer to my ear blaring an alarm or biting just a little // before that I had the flu // before that, confusion // the moon

Endure and Survive

Preparing the sunflowers for my altar,
I arrange each body in the vase, thinking
of *The Last of Us*. Zombie shows remind
me of how easy it is to be killed
when not viewed as human. In the video-
game the little brother protected through
everything is shot dead when he turns, same
as on tv. Hollywood guns turned
on kids of color really fucks me up.

What would it mean to grow like a sunflower
with no regard for fictional violence?
All the white men that wrote and reviewed
the scene agreed that each death was heavy,
and necessary, as opposed to gratuitous.

Sexton Sonnet

I hate Anne Sexton. I hate her like I hate
my own shortcomings, which is more sad and frightened
than it is hate. The way I recognize
a blind spot but can't see inside it.
Stupid immortality box.
Like one of those RBMK reactors.
Who do I think I am? And she,
the humiliating miracle. She,
the bird and the bludgeon. What world makes me without her?

Chernobyl exploded a few weeks before I was born,
and people were forced to poison themselves
to place a coffin over the remains.
Which version of history do we live in;
is it one person or a system that digs the grave.

Day 19

An Amnesty International field worker interviewed a father in Gaza who could not reach the remnants of his daughter

trapped under the rubble of their house. Upon finding her toe he kissed it, and kissed it, and kissed it. *This is the only thing*

that was left to him from her. We are some kind of plateau, or howling wolf at the edge of one, calling.

I could describe it as a mania;
the difference between how disconnected I feel,

cyclically, and then how aware of relationships
I become: The wolf and the plateau, the rot

and the life it calls, the weapons made here
and the body of a child buried inside her home.

If the man's name was reported, it would go here:
If his daughter's name was reported, it would go here:

Day 27

I've been a kaleidoscope of mothers responsive and forgetful,
writing names on waistbands and the insides of clothes

and not once have I written my child's name on her body,
in case no one that knows her is around to identify the dead.

A kaleidoscope uses at least two reflective surfaces, tilted towards
each other to create regular, symmetrical patterns.

My friend back home says writing letters is how she keeps herself honest.
Well dear reader, this is day twenty-seven of the Israeli government's

bombardment of Palestinian civilians. An internal document
from the country's ministry of intelligence suggests

they aim to permanently expel the population of Gaza
to the Sinai desert in Egypt. Where will all the names go

when there are no more mothers to write them—

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality: Dinner Party

one of me pours the tea // delights in its curls of steam // one follows a teacher's recipe // someone who says *make something you like* // one eats the paper these words are on // one explains the difference between "push" and "pull" // one waits for the baby to understand // one cuts the eucalyptus // one wrings her hands // one forgets // *love is not a feeling, but a place* the teacher said // one in love with phonetic spelling // one with a leather jacket and a smaller waist // brass knuckle necklace // one covered in tattoos of Baphomet // hoof sure on rocks (can one become more like themselves as they were as a child) // one who never became a lawyer and oh god where is she now // *you as the "I" are often out of your own reach* the teacher said // one who never gets above a whisper // one who sings every goddamn night // one who keeps the wick lit // one whose instinct is born now // later than the shadow between her and the sun // and I try to flesh out what the shadow is // something about fear of birds and how humanity developed // *instinct is not possible without previous experience* the teacher said // which leads to the question of danger // which place would I be in // are they all the same

If You String Your Dreams Together They Create Another Reality: Ghost Practice

Deeply disappointed with a meal I made // I offered it to my ancestors for their opinion // here's what they said to me // *your internal furnace flattens heat // brings it under your claws rather than outside you* // here I say this is what the dream looked like // but not what actually happened // *We've died a thousand persons before // but we don't have the stomach of the living—a hallowed, hallowed heat* // I slept through most of these moments // clutching my center in the dark // *take one poised to eat decay // and remember its flesh decisions* // jaw of a human veil // I was possessed by a speaking spirit // somewhat scared but I wanted to know // the difference between grinding mortar to pestle // and smashing it // words pulled at the corners of my mouth // here I try to hew closer to one scene before walking wildly away // *If taste stays in the mind, it will confuse live things for dead things* // here I try to make meaning: when I sit down to eat I now say // *what I have made is delicious.*

II. *Legend Of—*

“Anything with a spirit can get broke”

—*Nope*

Animal Cruelty

Therapy is always good in the beginning, except with this one therapist, who, when I told her I was Mexican, said that she *loves Mexico—rescued several dogs from there—that she shouldn't say this but Mexicans are cruel people. Unkind to the dogs in the street.* Back at work, two American cops talked about the weirdest cases of animal violence they'd ever encountered. I knew they knew I was listening. Though I tried not to, I heard the turtle's shell pierced and tied to a stake. I was not their colleague. I worked for *the other side*, that's what public defenders say, but their words drove me towards a dog hanging from a tree and the person who hung it there. The district attorney was *personally disgusted by the facts* and said she'd *love to make an example out of this case* and I believed her. I believe the propensity to punch down. I have a hard time believing district attorneys identify with people who go untreated, or people who depend on their children for translation, and definitely not people who do both. Paloma took a noose and strung the dog up, held the rope between her hands and hid her head behind a tree so she wouldn't have to watch. Her daughter called the cops. My cousin asked me what happens now after her brother was declared incompetent by a court and ordered into mental health treatment. *Nothing* I answered. *Nothing happens.* No one will take him to the doctor or ask him off the street. He attacked his sister, pulled the hair from her head because he's afraid of control, and if we call the cops they'll kill him.

Loyalty is the dog's mistake.
Standing beside its master
while the rope is tied.

Imago

After Natalie Diaz

I never knew my cousin was also an apiary—
a home for many moving live wires. Honeycombs
of interconnection between my memories and his.
Live wires really means realities, he said.

His pockets held a cloud of jaw and wing—
abdomens crawling, crowding, biter—
hunger filled the critters like smoke in a thurible.

What could I do but watch
when God capped his cell
with a worker's wax?

Wild washed in and spit ash—
how much trap could he take?

At the turning point
his mind came undone
like bees from a hive.

He grew a beard over his teeth
to keep from speaking familiar sounds.

Sometimes he gassed smoke in my lungs.
Why, he asked, *wouldn't home be here?*
These agitations, we couldn't stop repeating,
so he scoured his mouth and produced a bee—

Legend of—

Legend of armor, agitation. Legend of accusations. Legend of the first break. Legend of what's broken can't be fixed. Legend of the cornered animal. Legend of the double self. Legend of grasping at straws. Legend of *go take a shower*. Legend of hygiene. Legend of inheritance. Legend of the psych eval. Legend of misdemeanors. Legend of music and nostalgia. Legend of the original score. Legend of proselytizing. Legend of the quest. Legend of the refusal to seek services. Legend of schizophrenia. Legend of shouting through a bullhorn. Legend of self medication. Legend of too many timelines. Legend of the DV arrest. Legend of *when did this start?* Legend of exorcisms. Legend of *who are you?* Legend of the missing title character.

Disintegrating Crown

1.

I whistle for my past when I want to.
In one version, I wake up as a child.
I wake up missing an arm. I wake up
in the fallen timeline. Of all the violence

I play on repeat, *The Legend of Zelda* is the best:
I rewind time without tearing myself apart.
But the sky grows dark. The thief eyes the castle.
My environment glitters with fear. I die, die,

try again. Discover shield and sword.
Turn the knob up and down on nostalgia.
In each story I wake up, collect hearts,
stamina; here I describe childhood growth.

Am I a child in my disappointment?
We can never again be who we were.

2.

You can't be who you were here: subverting
my song of *remember when & hold my hand*
& *make this easy for me*. Shrines on the map
of our lives: We were all around the table
and you knocked on the window. My brother
let you in. Mom brought a plate; dad did the dishes.

We talked about dinner and this triggered you,
cousin. You had paranoid delusions
and many of them were about food.

You yelled, laughed, argued. I kept saying *whole*
food plant based diet like a prick. You scoffed
did you read that in a book. But I smiled
at you like I wanted something, and you left.
Understanding is love's other name.

3.

Understanding is love's other name,
so I pretend to know how this all fits together.
Each memory's dungeon must resolve in escape;
entry and exit are two sides of one coin.

You left Las Vegas for work. Drove to Kansas
with a car and clothes. Ended up in Florida
with nothing. Your sister said she offered you
a place to stay if you would just take a bath.

The spider's mind extends through its web,
the octopus through its arms. Somehow you came home
to the mojave's heat, into the old web spun
with our family's furious limbs. When was your first break?
I track these shifts with a learned devotion,
unable to name what I don't understand.

4.

There's so much I don't understand. I worked
in civil commitments at the PD's office
when you needed both a lawyer and a doctor.
I called patients to explain hospitalization
and due process, so I thought I could save you,
thought legal intervention would force you
into mental health treatment and things
would get sorted from there. By things
I mean: diagnosis, meds, trust.

A spider makes its web from liquid
inside its body; scientists believe the act
of "pulling on the thread" realigns liquid
molecules into solid form. Here I pull
on the line to make the web appear:

5.

Pull to make the web appear:
In open world games, quests can be done
in any order. “Side quest” refers
to the various plots that aren’t the main
quest of the game. Narrow objectives
foster a series of behaviors
that generate feelings of accomplishment.

The ball is finally rolling his sister
said when a court ordered treatment, but my aunt
bristled—*it's God's will not yours*. I condemned
this call to God at a time when we needed
to act, but all routes (esp. state services)
require some amount of faith to engage.
Where else could we turn? Where else can I turn?

6.

I turn to talk of you when you're not around,
watch your mother wince when I say I miss you.

Your old lawyer sent me a picture of you
shouting on a street corner, megaphone
in hand. I wonder if you're sleeping in a bed.

In the game's latest version, Link chases
sightings of Zelda around the map
until the last act when he learns he's been
following an imposter. The real Zelda
has turned into a dragon, flying above,
waiting for him to recognize her.

In dreams I dig into this fantasy.
The one where we're heroes of a single
narrative. The story we didn't live.

7.

The story we didn't live: I'm Link
and ready to fight. You're in need of saving
and together we escape the castle
tumbling to the ground. The villain is
never either of us or anyone
related, so when he shapeshifts
we only think of what kind of weapon
to use. He's a boar or a dragon
and to vanquish him does not turn the sword
back on ourselves. We break so many curses.

You go back to your old strengths and memories,
I return to any reality I want,
and we let that timeline go. We enjoy ourselves.
We have to go back to enjoying ourselves soon.

8.

We have to go back. Joy is possible,
but takes care & belief. A study
on cultural narratives and psychosis
reports that Americans were more likely
to name violence, trauma, & stress
in their hallucinations. Indian
patients found theirs more often linked with voices
of family, and Ghanaian patients
reported voices coming from God.

Minds extend through their webs. Many beings
have extended cognition. Break the spider's web
and they become confused, as if they've had a stroke.

Through the constant intake of others,
the mind is a territory in which we spin.

9.

The mind is a territory in which we spin.
Fanon said there is nothing more important
than relationships, and a patient's
experience matters. People are not things;
humanity is not a thing.
We are possibilities.

Did you know some spiders fly with their silk?
They stand up on hind legs and release
strands, which form triangular parachutes
that balloon them into the air.
It's dangerous for them—the distance
is unpredictable. Sometimes I think
you left one day and that was it. Sometimes
it's easier to think of you as dead.

10.

If you're gone or in the sky, then
I get to keep playing the game. On screen,
Zelda eats her secrets and turns
into the immortal light dragon.

The process is called draconification—
a six syllable word coined by *Tears
of the Kingdom*. Susceptibility
is another six syllables, as in
shift the framework from healthy and disordered
to the understanding that anyone
can have some degree of psychotic
experience. Then you and I can sit
beside each other forever, two notches
on the continuum of the world.