

New Build

by

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I. Unnatural Being

Origin

I.

Hi, I'm Meredith

Like Grey?

Not the star of the show
no McDreamys or McSteamys for McMe

like in The Office?

Not into pushing my
breasts together over file cabinets, pushing papers

(like my body, I'll need to leave some vestigial mass behind)

II.

Hi, I'm Mer

Wouldn't that be pronounced, "mûr?"

As in Errrr what was that?

like Mhyrr?

Not so clergy. Not so holy. Not a gift to be given from king to king. Not the perfume that dresses bodies to be wed and buried. Not to be mingled with wine, sponged onto Christ's lips.

Mare?

Not the mesomorphic equine of the divine feminine
her umber flank rippling, pure muscle, in the sun.

III.

(At the Gay Bar, a stranger offers me their name then pronouns. I offer my name—*One syllable name? Let me guess- they/them/theirs right?*

I cannot describe the relief)

IV.

Not what the manager expected, looking up from my C.V. *Meredith*? Two questions lurk in one.

What will we call her? My young parents pictured a feminine salt and light, grace and sea, pulled my pudgy limbs through lacy socks and bell-capped sleeves.

Where I live now, I can change my name. But in some states, my death certificate, like the birth certificate, will be marked F for female.

A spam of comments on a forum remind me, no matter what, an archaeologist a thousand years from now will say my bones are a woman's.

V.

It wasn't always a woman's name.

In Medieval Wales

Meredith is the name of kings.

I'll be a splendid lord for you,

Watch my raiment move in the wind.

See the longsword glint at my belt.

I have cords of muscle between my thighs.

I sit astride a great mare.

VI.

In French, I'll be your salty fickle sea, *La Mer*. In this language feminine, but in all languages mercurial, changing. I'll rest at the base of your house for a lifetime then sweep it away in a night's tempest. I'll cradle your boat in my palms and lick the rocks salty for all the cum I can't —. I'll spit phallic creatures: mollusk muscles, granulated sea stars, spoonworms until you swallow your "she's." This is how things evolve. Language, names, and bodies. Remember where we all started, a mudskipper hauling limbs out of fins before it all proceeded as we contrived.

VII.

We insist some things
are fixed:

(unnatural/immoral) vs. (natural/moral)

grammar has always been standard
"they" has always been plural

certain names are just for women,
certain names are just for men

what artifice we cling to
illusion of rigidity
a society stilted
on binary legs

beneath us in swamps
and oceans our elders
Clownfish and Green Frog
preserve the knowledge we lost:

Trans ness is the privilege of partaking
in our own mutable creation.

Girl Body Exposed

((((((((The window was heavy))))))))) My body
not yet:

strong grown
 enough

to pull the sash with one hand

 my towel
 loosely tied
 lifting both arms

 exposed me

dark outside ((((((lamp on in my room)))))) my mother was there

asked what are you

 doing?!

 my shame

 resounding

from hers

Nightly Ritual

monitoring the sighs of floorboards
and pipe groaning four walls of my grown-up apartment
unable to contain my wandering
through time my child self in bed with that
purple flower quilt my ears straining
to catch the creak of hinges on that
wooden wardrobe the only furniture we had with
a lock and next
the rummaging the semi-circle sound of a bottle
set on granite clink pour
and ice cubes pushed from their individual
nests and crashing sounds
usually furniture
then ascending steps if i strain i hear it now
the plunk plunk plunk plunk
and on nights with stumbles i wait to
see how bad and hope... part of me hoping
that this time...

i cant say
what i would have done what i could do
but to get a paper bag for the glass shards &
a rag for the vomit &
only call 911 when he told me to
 what could i feel but
a terror he didn't have to feel

he fell asleep cradling
a cold glass

Crazy! Dyke!

it's a shame all this shame is so deeply internalized
shame sticks in the body. hardens in the kidneys. calcifies.

it is rock hard in my gut, unmoving as I pathologize.
shame came from a middle school lockerroom.

my friend caught me staring at her breasts in the lockerroom.
self-hate is an active act of ruining. it takes chunks of normalcy & devours.

not like I-have-three-day-of-dishes or it's-too-hard-to-shower
more like I started hearing voices and both arms began to twitch

the hospital determined it an isolated malfunction. a little glitch.
I was in carceral care to keep safe from myself. nothing to feel shame or worry about.

locked in a locker. *crazy! dyke!* nothing to feel shame or worry about.
it's a shame all this shame is so deeply internalized.

Dialogue with Brain

unleashed brain reinvented the wheel brain taught myself six new hobbies this month and forgot my doctor's appointment yesterday brain focus time brain buckle up brain time to rev that engine again brain let's try that again now brain we were supposed to be doing something brain remember that thing we forgot to do three months ago we keep meaning to do that thing lets do it right now while we're thinking of it or we'll forget forever go brain reroute brain sit at the desk all day and nothing to show for it try again brain better luck next time brain stuck in the mud brain gonna need to get out and push brain trunk full of cement brain prescription diet meth for you brain walking desk for you brain go to the library brain body mirroring brain watch how much work they do when they are working and feel worthless brain lost in daydreams again brain sat staring into space-do galaxies ever feel like they're not doing as much as they "should"? do you think Galaxy NGC 2500 is insecure that a 2017 NASA article said its arms are "wispy"? It's only a letter away from "wimpy" and in the context of arms at least it's simply never a compliment to say "wispy" but somehow that's still not as bad as Large Magellanic Cloud I mean can you imagine being a literal galaxy all vast and sparkling and a whole planet of over-evolved apes names you after one of their own who's best known for accidentally finding a way to get around a singular planet, a feat he only embarked on because he didn't know how to go back the way he'd come? Not to mention his discoveries only initiated a long history of exploitation, subjugation and genocide, a 500 year legacy of evil in which we are still collectively entrenched? Personally I'd be pissed if this was my namesake! realistically if galaxies have time to care about what they're judged on they probably don't feel like they need to conform to human metrics of success brain rewind that thought brain we were just in the middle of something brain couldn't wait your turn to speak could you brain interrupted that person brain object permanence brain your friends are still there when they aren't in front of you brain lost your phone again brain remember brain Magellan didn't even make it home we are constantly drifting off course and arrival is not the goal oh brain mixed up the time again brain trying to steer us somewhere brain quit dragging it out brain just get it done brain trudge onward brain against the current brain everybody else can do it just fine

Standing on the Lawn, Ending with a Line from Roethke

considering the mole as a kind of country creature,
a *Wind in the Willows* type
in a handknit jumper with neat glasses, I'd be the villain
for dropping poison into holes, envisioning cartoon mallets
to settle his debt in one swift smash.
weevils, fleas, june beetle grubs, aphids, cutworms, molecrickets- on these
we all agree. but the mole that bores beneath my even green,
destroying in the night (like he knows it wrong)
leaving his little dirt mounds to taunt...

like the rest of nature, the mole does not care how I feel.

I wait in the night with my scythe and a grub on a fishing line.
movement's the dead giveaway.
foul brown smudge slinking through the grass.
only enough brain cells to flee from my shifting.

nights I spent rolling up sod like carpet. swigging whisky. I laid my land bare
and barren. my remorse evaporated when I got close enough to hear his grimy hands digging.
scraping. when the shovel broke, when its handle snapped, I began to use my hands. dirt
beneath my nails. caking up my sleeves. tearing tunnels around his tunnels. I wouldn't even
stop for the sun. by midday he became stupid or lazy and I got him.

he was smaller than small in my hand. and soft.
I told him what I was going to do. he seemed to be listening.

and that scared me.

Returning from the Foodbank

— a murmur of birds
my lover says her brother had the same
tongue trip, stumbled when eyes
were on him. haddock or chowder?
you can have both. you can have both.
rice? kidney beans? in therapy, we work
on saying *I*. I need help. we pull into the
wrong driveway. a cat greets our car. tail
up, and calling. he believes we are his owners
and I'd like to pretend we are. we pass a burned
house. pass crows sorting seed from clay. a narrow-
hipped fox near the dumpsters. four deer at the
forest's edge. I startled the starlings. a muhmuh
of buhds. flying so closely without colliding.

Terminal Burrowing

I. Mystery

Missing: Gastropod Mullosk. Bright yellow.
Approx. Golf ball-sized. Responds to "Gary"

Morning spent scooping sand-
no trace of the subject.
corycats swear up
and down they don't know
anything and the guppies
wouldn't tell me if they did, little bastards.

It seems the Mystery Snail rolled
right into a wrinkle in the fabric of space-time.
By now, the little guy must be in a galaxy far away.

I'll search under the furniture.

II. Prey Instinct

Instinct says:
make yourself small
and the threat won't find you.
I squeeze my legs to my chest.
I am a vacant shell, I am
an inert rock suspended
between the before
and the after.

III. Map

a possible path
across the sand up the inner pane of glass over
the lip of the tank down the outer
pane of glass down the leg of the table
into a crevice
fit for dying

what drove him to climb up
the wall of his world?

IV. Body

her own braincells' cancerous
mutiny against her body only began
last August. it's January.

the last time I saw her
she was propped up in that bed like
a shell.

I am looking for her in every vessel;
handbag, compact, teacup, journal,

I place them around me on the carpet
and curl up in their center.

V. Surely

long dead by the time I found
him, not 15 feet from his tank,
wedged in the entertainment drawer
between Uno and Jenga,
lifted his too-light shell,
peered deep deep within & said

surely,

this can't be all
that remains.

just a peanut-sized pebble
of muscle burrowing
into itself —

VI. Terminal Burrowing

an autonomous process of the brain stem,
reminiscent of a mammal entering hibernation,
a person suffering hypothermia's final stages
will crawl into enclosed, illogical places:
in a cabinet, beneath a car seat, under a bed,
behind a wardrobe.
that primordial coding: crawl, curl, contract,
shrink in the face of death.

VII. Imagine

I'm possibly over-anthropomorphizing here but it wrecks me to my core thinking about Gary dying alone in an inhospitable environment slowly running out of water in his own shell and pulling himself so far inward running out of time while I searched under furniture probably inches away from where Gary was curled, drying, dying. Camus is wrong the struggle itself towards heights is not enough—

One Must Imagine

Gary
careening through space
as a beam of light

VIII. Prey Instinct

when my mother gave me the news
I held my face together and went to the bathroom
I sank to the rug drew all my limbs into my chest
as if by being small I could hide from the inevitable
I wanted it to be possible
to go further into myself
I wanted to settle into the cradle
of my pelvis, I wanted to hide
in my innermost ear, I wanted to
tuck between the folds
of my brain.

Memory Washes Ashore Almost Completely Intact

she collects me in embrace
says she'll love to kiss whatever
I have down there and with this she is pulling
a fistful of gravel from my throat

dulled axe pulled tooth deer skull with
maggots caged skunk behind ribs
rapid pulse cover my crotch
with bubbles things behave

differently when we
pay attention to them
even quarks or so I've read in the mirror
fields are already flying out of memory
childhood was cricket catching with bare hands and then
it ended with two mourning doves

stop go back retrieve
the bird carries her most precious egg in her beak the morning comes with gold
in its mouth a beautiful image stop go back
he was not my usual
doctor didn't say a word felt my birds
pulled down undies looked

a tree fell in a forest and didn't cry out

blowflies frenzy over the red rotting meat
a wound is a kind of opening too I am guilty
of picking the scab this red scar of a thing foreign body

a pair of scissors with my lips between the blades

who wouldn't want it gone

toothless mouth wordless mouth the worms writhe in me

&my voice slinks under a rock all the soap couldn't keep

my grandfather's wandering eyes away he looked

from the doorway he lingered

& I tied a brick to this & I threw it into the canal & shoved a pillow in its face & forced the
bobbing thing down &

molar grinding sawdust wet rag tongue wrung

a cry catches

she is licking my wound

II. Out Of Body

Repair Clinic

13:45, Day 6, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

To the human I was,

I just got back from the clinic for my first repair this season. I've been going there for restorations and replacements for half a century and it was only this time that I realized why that waiting room unsettles me. I've never been nervous for the repairs. We have the technology now to replace any of the technology that's failing- and it isn't like you'd think it'd be to watch your parts melted and reconfigured. It isn't the gruesome affair that your surgeries were. I'm not disturbed by leaving with new materials inside me. "Foreign Bodies" I guess you'd call them.

There aren't risks of infection, like the biomechanics of your time presented. It's all a very simple process. Things break, I go, they're repaired, I keep on living. It's the waiting room that I dread. It hasn't changed, in all this time, it hasn't changed. Not the flooring, nor the wall paneling. There aren't chairs- we don't tire anymore. There's no media. No magazines. The screens advertise cosmetic upgrades. It's the wall art that disturbs me. 500 years and it hasn't changed. Clear water. Blue sky. White sands. A tree arching over one side, heavy with some long extinct fruit.

Uploaded Memories

6:00, Day 7, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

To the human I was,

In your human life, not long before the first mass extinction of the 21st century, you spent some time in a psychiatry unit. I can't smell, not exactly, so it would be hyperbolic and insincere if I said I could remember what it smelled like. You wrote in your journal it was like lemon and bleach. You hated the PVC film they slapped over the ceiling lights that looked like the tops of trees filtering the fluorescents into a fake sun. The wall mural of the winding forest that had been pasted poorly so you could see the river not lining up with the river. They let you out in the courtyard for twenty minutes a day (it was a law), and you would read Thich Naht Hanh books while walking in a slow circle around the perimeter. Do you remember the patient who would get yelled at for getting dirt on his scrubs? He would lay in the middle of that little patch of Earth and cover the sides of his eyes, like horseblinders, so that he couldn't see the buildings containing us. Only blue sky.

22:00, Day 7, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

To the human I was,

I remember everything since I was uploaded to this unit those long years ago. It's only your memories that feel fuzzy and that upsets me. One of the benefits of the robot casing was supposed to be an endless memory, but the data from that original upload was so compressed... The technology wasn't where it needed to be, in all honesty. We were up against the climate clock. It was rushed. And there've been glitches. Part failures. Malfunctions. I've lost so much of my old form. I don't remember what it felt like to be you. I was reading through your papers and there's a long series of letters to your mentor. She died of brain cancer before you got a chance to talk to her about her dying, but it still took months to watch her die. The cancer was aggressive, they said. The last time you saw her in the hospital it felt so much like she wanted to speak. You gave her a printed out picture of her and you and had written below it, in the white page space, "I love you." So when she took the paper in her hand and tried to turn it around to you though her hands shook it looked almost as if she was handing it away but you realized she was trying to show you those words because she couldn't speak. She was trying to tell you, "I love you." At least we had that

moment but so much was left unsaid so you had to write letters after. Which is to say, it's interesting. This urge to write to someone who can't hear you. You began all the letters to her with "Dear" as in "you are Dear to me." I have been addressing you as "Source" or "the Human I was" because it feels wrong to use your human name. I don't know how much you liked having a woman's name anyway. I could address you as "me." You are me. I am you. But you are also my Creator. Not a Father God nor a Mother God nor a desperately death-defying Victor Frankenstein. You just adapted into me so you could survive. Made a new being to live in when your environment made the old thing inhospitable. In your journals from year 6 you wrote that you might be an alien or a wizard or elf who forgot you were an alien or a wizard or an elf when you accidentally got trapped in a human body. Was this when you first came to understand yourself as "other?"

Earth Dreams

23:00, Day 14, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

To the human I was,

I came across the first sketch you submitted to the Cyber-physical Housing Engineers. It made me remember so clearly. You drew it in the night, when you would have been sleeping. You were elated but the idea wouldn't feel real until you told another human. So, you sat by the biofuel digester and boiled water for tea until your friend awoke, bleary eyed and nodding briefly before sitting down on a milkcrate next to yours. It took everything in you to give her a sixty second grace period to wake up before you whipped the sketch out and launched into a long monologue about how the upload may be a chance to become, on the outside, the person you'd always wanted to inhabit the world as,

that it had finally occurred to you that you could create yourself the way you'd imagined. She didn't make eye contact and you kept on talking about the boys' clothes you wore when you were a kid. When you finally ran out of words she let the silence sit before saying, "Last night was the peak of the Apogee. The point where we are furthest from the moon." You thought maybe she hadn't heard you, or had chosen not to, disapproving of your fixation on how you'd like to appear to everyone else. You wanted to swallow back the words that had slipped out.

"You know how people get really intense dreams during the full moon?" You nod, "those are usually fears, or just your imagination stretching into its most convoluted forms. Moon dreams show us our shadow and it's good to look at but don't rearrange your life over a dream from the moon. You do need to listen to Earth Dreams. Earth Dreams come from our

ancestors and our dead and they come to remind you of the work you are doing. We know our days in human bodies are numbered after what our ancestors did to this biome. So we adapt to survive. We upload ourselves to computerised mechanic housing to survive. I understand the humans that are ready to die out. They think this is their God's justice. They say what we're going to do is a crime against nature. They think we are evil for violating our sacred bodies. For taking our consciousness out of a living body. They prefer to die than to survive. You and I believe it's our duty to stay and begin to heal and assist the biome in finding a new-normal. We accept the risks that we'll lose something in this transition. I know our ancestors wouldn't want this to be joyless. The whole movement was about joy. Joy in defiance. Joy as militancy. Humans have always been about joy. If surviving joyfully means you design your unit to reflect your ideal form, if that's a more masculine form, then we have to do everything in our power to make that happen."

In Defense of the Robot I Became

19:03, Day 20, Dry Season, Year 509 N.E.S. (New Earth Standard)

they said Don't Play God the air was thick & burned
to breathe & animals our scientists never got to catalogue

died tangled in our fishing nets in parts of the ocean we'd
never seen & we let whole countries die in floods & fires

& pandemics because they were on the other side
of borders & we let children die in workshops making

our clothing for the season & we kept wild animals
in cages & we kept children in cages & we let our wages

buy bombs to bring hospitals to the
ground & we only cried when this happened
on a screen in a movie

b/c the movie was fiction & the patients in the hospital
who were murdered were white & their hero
was white & white viewers viewed ourselves
as saviours & we raised a fist
to our government & lead a righteous
riot & everyone knew
our name
how many movement leaders are in it for fame?

they said what we were doing wasn't natural & I watched a winter in Chicago without snow
& they said God designed us

in His Image & they said we are what He Intended & they tried
to make our existence illegal & they clung to hate

if the hate went they would have to feel guilt & then grief
& then change & they had never, not once, recalled a story

where they weren't the main character & they can't conceive of a world
where the main character loses the plot & behaves in ways even the author didn't intend &
they needed us to stay in fragile selves

they needed us

they needed us
they needed us

afraid because God fearing is obedient & because the self hate we feel
is righteous & our penance can be paid in cash, check, credit, or ballot

they need us to vote for anyone for the harm reduction choice
for anyone
who could make the war machine keep turning

a profit & their dogma relies on dichotomies:

Male. Female. Good. Evil. Worker. Investor.

& their war needs a battleground & their battleground hungers for
bodies

of flesh

Unrealized Form

23:00, Day 24, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

Dear You,

I don't think I've ever said thank you to you. I'm sorry. Thank you for remaking yourself for me. I know how scared you were that it would feel like being locked in a metal box. Like Ellison's "I have No Mouth and I can't Scream." You were worried how much of you would change. We did change. I sacrificed not just your body but parts of you on the way to me. I lost your certain way of moving through the world. And I lost memories. I forgot you. I forgot to honor you. Thank you. Forgive me.

Love,

Robot

3:16, Day 25, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

Dear You,

We still wear clothes sometimes. I bet you didn't expect that. They're generally understood to be optional and only really mandatory on formal occasions but some of us dress everyday. It's a nice ritual. When you don't sleep nothing else really divides the days from each other so it can help to do something like that. Anyways, I'm going to the Solar Fields later to help with a Citizen Science inventory of wildlife. Solar Fields are a surprisingly great habitat. A lot of our structures become that way if we let other life forms inhabit them. We used to be so selfish with our space. Even a rat beneath the subway was offensive to some. Remember Molly's old apartment in Pilsen with that decrepit old porch and the pigeon family that nested there? You ended up getting pretty distraught when they found the first one passed in the heatwave of October '58. Granted I think your way of coping with the obvious harbinger of the climate crisis was to take psilocybin and contemplate the massive grief of a planet being unwound by one species. You were unlucky enough to be reminded by your girlfriend that pigeons had been domesticated. We kept them in our homes as pets and had them run our errands until we invited better post systems and we cast them out and they only stayed in cities because they wanted to be near us and had never known any other life and that's why they are so atrocious at making nests. I remember you always kind of were that way, feeling things so deeply they hurt. Even the good feelings could hurt, because you also had the

awareness of time and you couldn't just hold one or the other and it felt impossible to understand how much could change in one life.

Field Notes

11:00, Day 25, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

Soil beneath Solar panels rich with invertebrate life, indicates good soil health identified isopods, springtails, fruit fly larvae, red wiggler worms (though skin is tougher, more shell-like than when observed last), spider mites, ironclad beetles. Microscopes reveal presence of tardigrades in the plenty. Sending samples to the lab for tests for micro plastics, radiation. Suspected evidence of burrowing rodents in the form of 2” diameter holes, though admittedly could have been a snake den. Photographed and sent along with soil samples.

Vestigial Mass

17:00, Day 25, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.

Dear You,

I don't think you have any idea how many poems you wrote that mention water. You're obsessed. It's like you couldn't even see a flooded ditch without wanting to go for a swim. Sometimes I do miss that end of day ritual of bathing. I take a microfiber cloth to my exterior components to prevent any environmental grit from causing long term damage, but I try to wear clothing when I leave the shelter for the elements so there's usually not much to clean off. My field research outfit is one of my favorites. A sturdy canvas button down with utility pockets. A silver chain necklace. A classic old American bandana. A round brimmed sun hat, which isn't strictly necessary with my lens' ability to adjust to light levels, but it sets the tone for the outfit. Waterproofing foot covers designed to look like Combat Boots. A little carabiner for your keys as an homage to our sapphic human ancestors. But the star of the show is the Khaki cargos. They make every outing feel like an adventure that I am completely prepared for. Remember when you were a kid and you always had those oversized cargos on? They're a bit like those. There's too many pockets, but it means I never have to carry a backpack. It's not like we ever need to carry anything but it's all for the look.

It's actually amazing how light I can travel compared to you. You carried so much with you in order to survive. Water, which you needed often, all throughout the day, food, which you also needed often, and more than other women found womanly, a knife for protection, a pocket computer to make calls and search the web, a charger, lip balm because your lips always dried out, sunscreen if you wanted to be out in the peak hours of the day without damaging your cells, a notebook and pen because you didn't contain your own log, headphones because the human world was often so busy and noisy you needed to tune it out to move through it, little plastic and rubber fidgets so you wouldn't pick your nail bed to a bloody mess, sunglasses so your sensitive eyes could see without watering, a watch so you knew what time it was without the social faux faux of looking at your pocket computer at the wrong time in the wrong setting. You were so obsessed with time. Your whole life ran according to it, and mostly, with your brain, time was a very stressful container for events and location changes. You were always late. Or left too soon. Or forgot to go. I like keeping time now. It keeps me from being completely unmoored.

22:38, *Day 25, Dry Season, Year 509 O.E.S.*

Dear You,

You know what else I like that you didn't? Getting dressed. Putting on clothes. I don't know if you ever really paid attention to just how uncomfortable you were in your own body. I don't think you knew that that was different from anyone else who was Assigned Female At Birth. Society profited off of people feeling insecure about their bodies, and you heard the women around you, in fitting rooms and bedrooms and on screens, hate what they saw when they looked at themselves. In your journal, at age 16, you wrote that you might get saline implants one day because none of your prom dresses fit and you looked like a board but you had already forgotten what you would only recall and record years later onto the back of a photograph of you, age 10, at your ballroom dance recital, white gloves, red eyes, snotty nose, that you had been late to the dance because you wouldn't stop crying and clinging to the top bunk bed, refusing to wear a dress because they never "feel right." Remember, in your 20s, how you could only leave the house in a collared shirt with a double sports bra on, so tight it was hard to breathe, because you so abhorred the violation of breasts, the feel of the movement and momentum of them, how they moved as something separate from the rest of the body, the gaze of others on them?

Thank you for giving me the chance you didn't have. I like the flat chest plate, the broad shoulders, the resonant and rumbling voice I hear when I speak. I think it's funny you went back in and sauntered your tattoos onto me. Like moving houses, and keeping only the decor that fits. I want you to know I buried your remains in a suit. You looked sharp. It's okay that you didn't figure out how badly you wanted that until after you'd already lost the chance to. I get the chance to.

III. Earth Dreams

So I dropped it

come noon what isn't obscured
by the oppressive glare of sun is hiding
in the eaves of the bank is resting

at the roots of trees where only
the insects still thrum and even they
in their arboreal undertaking enact

a resonant still even the pools
hold their pulse close a kind of
ritual of numbing I always take

a stone to pocket only one
not weight enough to keep me
under just a little grounding

what doesn't move with
the river is swallowed in it a stone
too heavy to keep carrying

Chicken Has a Word with Sheep

Dear Neighbor,

Before the humans
unleashed you on our yard,
I enjoyed the whistle of bluejays,
the guttural reeder-ree
staccato chirps of the common grackle,
the tumbling cheery cheery
cheery of the wren, the twitter
of the chimney swift, the mellow broken
trill of the narrow-winged cricket and the
lawn-sprinkler ratchet of the meadow katydid.
I even came to love that mechanical pulsating
buzz of the swamp cicada. The perfectly
balanced orchestra was the soundtrack
to a good life. Not an easy life
but still good.

Now all I hear is your constant, mournful raucous.
Just the shadow of a figure in the farmhouse window
sends you blaring your need to the whole neighborhood.
You yell as if you're starving. As if you're worried they'll
forget to feed you. As if the humans don't always have
to feed you before me just so you'll stop your screaming.
As if you're convinced we eat the same food, and they'll
run out. There's always been enough for everyone.
Still you sit on the stoop and bleat.

At first, I thought your cries
were pitiful, even sweet. I worried
you were lonely, not adjusting to your

new home with ease. I tried to always
check on you. To be there to listen.
Crying got you plenty of attention from
the humans, too. *Poor sweet little
lamb*. They cooed and sat stroking
your side. But it got old the older
you did. You're grown now.

Your brassy, nasally, plaintive
cry makes all of you unlikeable.
You plow through the field
with that too-wide forehead
that shoves your eyes so far apart,
their pupil slits all wrong and alien.
The gears of your mouth working,
working, working, unhinging your
jaw, still full of unswallowed cud,
to let loose that blaring yell.

Look, I'm not saying you're wrong to complain.
Life has been cruel to you, too. Who knows
how early you were taken from your mother's
warmth, what loneliness still emanates from
that primal wound. It's just you make it sound
like you're dying.

I'm a chicken. Basically everyone wants to murder me.
Coyotes, Foxes, Bobcats, Hawks, sure —
but also Owls, Opposums, Skunks, Rats, Minks, Weasels,
Martens, Raccoons, even the dog — who believes you are
just another dog — sees me as prey. And trying to protect
my babies? Forget about it. Snakes eat our eggs before
they hatch, consume our chicks before they grow.
I know things hurt you, too. But you are always

crying. I'm afraid us chickens will all get eaten
and no one will know because our cries
will be drowned in your bleating.

get quiet or get out,

Signed,

Chicken.

Addendum.

Dear Neighbor,

I'm sorry I sent that letter.

I hope you can see that my anger
was just fear. I'm sorry I insinuated that
your problems aren't real. Your pain
is real. Your loneliness is immense.

You never deserved to be hated
for hurting. I wrote you full of ego
and resentment. That was ugly of me.

As exasperated as I am by your behaviour,
I'm even more jealous. I wish I could
stop holding my pain so privately.

I'm so afraid of playing the victim
that it all got pent up and twisted
and I made you a villain. Your
crying is justified. It isn't an easy
life. It's okay if you don't forgive
me. I just wanted to write to say
sorry, and, to say one other thing:

when you're ready to stop crying,
if you're able to
stop crying,
you might hear
the chuckle of robins,
the brittle late autumn switchgrass
rustling dried stalks of purple stem aster,
wind singing in green bullrush and cut leaf
coneflower blowing a confetti of yellow petals
that whisper on currents of air. If,

even momentarily, you can what's heavy
down, you'll hear the babble
of the catch basin filling with
runoff from last night's rain,
see how a pond forms from
all the water the ground
couldn't hold?

It isn't an easy life. Maybe it
never will be. But you don't
need a crisis
to be comforted.

Maybe it was that way
for you, at some point.
Maybe you were only tended to
after hurting.

Maybe you were so far
estranged from joy
that it still feels foreign.

That's okay. Perhaps in a week, a month,
a year, you can listen for a breath, a minute,
an hour, a morning, to everything that's been here, listening
to you. If you'll allow me, I could come to your pen.
We could sit. Together. We wouldn't need to be happy.
We could just
sit—

Safety as Impossible as Flight

my lover falls asleep as soon as her head
hits the pillow
i'm left wondering what spaced-out pilot
is supposed to be flying this mind of mine
charted a brash course of productivity &
proceeded to zone
swan dived into 2am light of
a bad wattpad fic accidental
double dose of antidepressant tethered me
to consciousness & while i am so thankful for
my legs i still wish it was safe to be in a trans body
in public @ night
but even more cautious
-ly placed street lamps won't open that
avenue for all this chemical churning no sympathy for
turtles not yet hatched but already drowning
in rising seas o well the climates change its ever
encroaching tide this rush & retreat of
serotonin re-uptake is leaving me
parched & the world is leaving
me cynical i cut my teeth on
SSRIs back in high school even then
my house was built too close to water they say

the tide will keep rising
like this & the plane
will keep growing heavier
in the sky

On Ivan Albright's The Door

With a line from Louis Glück

In the movies, the threat is always right behind
the door. tiger in the bush just out
of sight. fear lives in periphery-
fear is real, imagined, or, perceived.
this hypervigilance is a feat of convergent evolution.
things that survive learn foreboding.
nature's patterning runs on nightmare logic.
nature has invented the crab so many times
there is a word for it. it's by this logic that I fall
asleep instead of drift. that I startle
and feel like I'm falling.
hypnagogic facts make me feel animal.
like a primate that had been nestling in a tree.

tell me that at the end of death there is a door. *at the end of
my suffering. there was a door.* tell me we get to go around
another time. can I just have that?
so that if I get the phonecall
(which my nightmares rehearsed) & my little sibling
has died & it is real & not imagined—
it won't feel like endless
falling

sometimes when i am almost asleep
i think i am still in the room we shared.
if time accordion folds in
on itself, im always still there.
half-lidded gazing at the sliver of yellow
light
under our door.

fear of losing them is constantly in my periphery.
that morning, in my kitchen, at the train station,
then on the brown line, fear followed me 6 blocks
into The Art Institute, into the Art of Americas wing,
& waited for me under eight feet of canvas.

when i picked up the phone, fear quieted.
deep breath before going under.

That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do (The Door)
loomed. the word

“Overdosed” cornered me, like an animal,
between public and private. is it safe to feel?

time isn't a line. time isn't an arrow. time is a river
it trickles & surges & swallows us & we are

in it like an animal bulging the gut of a snake

I am afraid of losing them every day.

They are always asleep

in the bed across the room.

To the New House,

beyond u there's a field where the foxes say goodnight
& a different kind of dusk lays low to the ground—waiting
for wandering eyes to drive it deeper into thickening trees

i once called that wilderness home— i said i was motherless
& drank rain & rested until shadows arrived
to drive me out like insistent farm dogs

they brought me to the porch light— to the storm door's creak
old house that hurt me— that was the scene of so much hurt
i'll close the curtains—wild things freer with no one watching

i'll be wilder when no one is watching— sledgehammer
swinging— becoming is a messy business—ruin to reprise

smash pinecones exhume their seeds

you are the 1st outpost on the edge of imminent
un-making— the re-write— you are where I'll take my bulldozed
body to rebuild—molting feathers and fur.

you are the den I slink into—newly naked and loosely
gathered— gutted and stitched

don't call it violence
this carnage is our catalyst
we'll plant a tree
u can see
thru the kitchen window
don't call it violence
i'll build a wall that lets in

a little more light
don't call it violence
the view from here
is good
don't call it violence
call it our
little spruce

Not Gone Body

girl body not gone body vestigial body no longer needed body

beloved body house body

dear body

i thirsted & you drank

i hungered & you hunted

i tired & you slept

when the first inkling of exit arrived like an itch under my skin

when in horror i found the woods feel safer than these walls

it's okay body

witness

the body

evicting me

body

not cruel body

not cage body

not turtle-spine-fused-

to-shell body

cocoon body

amniotic body

cicada shell body

excess tissue body

eggshell body

like default avatar body

NPC body draft one body

standard settings body

i'll leave you without a sever without a tear

changes don't have to be violent

renovated body my not dead body

it's okay

body

I never needed you

gone body.