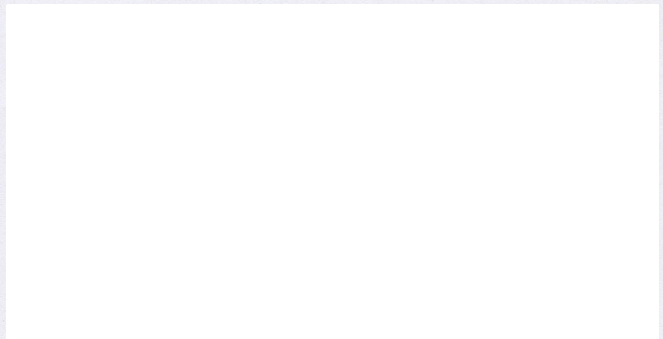


Crop of Salt

By

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There are upward one million feral pigs in Florida.  
I've begun to feel the scratchy interior of my skull and that is worrisome.  
Darwin's Doing  
I can become my own with something more than joy.

## **Another Part of the House**

Heat-hush looms like wisteria  
over a southern spring, carries

a sweetness that catches me home—  
toes on simmering porch wood and nails.

Mother or father or someother off  
searching bathroom shelves for iodine. Or  
standing still in the kitchen,

dishes obediently drip-drying in the sink:

teasing out  
the memory of bodies            young

from the endless honeycomb  
of afternoon,  
rooms within rooms.

## **Writ in the Sky by Birds**

My mother makes decisions like other people swim. Splash, flail, a little kick—  
but no forward movement. She floats. Which is good because she saves energy

and soaks up the two blue domes above and beneath her. Reserves the right to change  
back into a fish or give up the effort altogether.

Still, she works like she can divine the future, the sea. The dead must be done with.  
Bent over with a spade and hatchet, she prunes back the salvia, the hydrangea,

the butterfly bush. Piles of sticks bloom around her knees.  
Toenails are cut to the quick. The big toe on her left foot dipped in blue rot

is stripped clean. Curved clips of keratin jump from her like fleas  
and burrow into the sides of the house. Parasites. She trims mine too.

Closets are roadblock and are turned out, emptied, abandoned to the street. They'll make it  
or they won't. I take the rings. She waffles.



## **I Don't Like The Way Jack Gilbert Writes About Women**

Jack Gilbert says shiploads of thuya are what my body wants  
to say to your body.

Thuya are coniferous trees.  
With sharp scale leaves and cone studded limbs. And shiploads.  
That would crush you.

No, Gilbert only knew when to use  
proper nouns. How to write  
about places that weren't his own.  
Nothing about my      or

your body. Which demands  
three stalks of lavender  
circling the timbre of hip bone.

### **Blessed Are the Cheese Makers**

To eat a quesadilla with no remorse  
is to name and celebrate  
the god in you.

There It is living  
in your mouth. Thin tortilla  
on tongue; refried beans and cheese

melded into one smear  
song of carb and joy and proof  
of the thousand ways milk fat brings glory

(praise the cow).

## Why Don't You <sup>1</sup>

pinch off your freckles, wear them as a crown  
weld a cleaver to your forearm so as to always be a cut above the rest

sew false eyelashes out of iris petals, tinge your vision with lavender cream

limp with fish fins into a city street and stop all the rush of wheels  
with your bizarre scales, warped evolution

come home from work  
floss your joints with velvet pulled  
from a fox hunt tapestry  
commissioned by a nondescript medieval lord.  
(the fiber carries 500 years of looking and will erase all scars incurred)

dole out teaspoons full of soap into all the punch bowls at dinner parties  
gnaw on candles to turn wrinkles into wax  
stop touching your face

wrap strips of bacon around your neck so as to always have a snack and be alluring

speak backwards for a year to eliminate nostalgia  
shower in champagne, drink liquid gold  
harass the breeze

until it whimpers at your heels  
lampoon your father on wrought iron. look! the martyr he always wanted to be  
leave your house

---

<sup>1</sup> title taken from *Diana Vreeland's first column in Harper's Bazaar*

## **Vulture**

Gravel eyes, you say  
the devil has  
but they are reflective blue  
like a deep

river that doesn't move.  
No deals in fire. Nothing red  
enough to match the disguise.  
Ashen face and hands. You described the devil

as a man. It isn't. They aren't.  
The devil is a ghost only  
a dance in air and mist.  
No body to speak of,

but still something of a three-button suit.  
Something of a backroom  
and a bargain. A dirt road:

the granules worn into powder,  
a child in a ruffled nightgown running from it.



## What Daddy Remembers <sup>2</sup>

### I.

surrender

in a 1936 Chevrolet 4 door sedan.

Swollen

weight

woman

early

I

heard

both born

saved

stuck

many

carry that name

wonder

any

lay claim to a

gun

a

boozier, but city fathers want

their

favorite son

notorious, even more so.

---

<sup>2</sup> This is the first section of an erasure series spread throughout this manuscript of the first chapter of my father's memoir.

**Americus Columbus Studstil, known as Mac for short, raised my Granny.**

wiregrass reaching out lengths in dry clumps, green straw  
tickling the wet warmth moving low between the pine  
trees—

Americus Columbus Studstill was baptized four years after  
the Civil War in the Little Choctawhatchee River  
by a man named Paul who his mama, Winnie Lee, thought was too well  
dressed to be a good preacher but smiled, said yes, sewed  
wedding lace for the gown.

no cornstalks coaxed from the ground into standing  
armies of praying mantises only pigs, potatoes, mustard greens,  
some tobacco to smoke and sell—

Americus Columbus Studstill learned how to till at ten;  
easing the plow down behind the ox, testing the soil  
mud with the balls of his feet, how easy  
is the give.

peach light fragile and cresting behind the yellow  
farm house, the one hundred and fifty acres, stuck-viscous  
globs, resin droplets for a pair of patent leather shoes—

Americus Columbus Studstill jiggling my Granny  
on his knee, belly round whispering poison,  
prayers, habits my hand may still recall;  
while her Granny scrapes that week's breakfast fat from

the skillet with a hunting knife that my Uncle Bobby  
would one day pull from his Wrangler utility belt,

point at me and then the fish, blade-gleam on glimmer-flesh,  
saying kill it. Kill it dead. Slice down but not through the backbone.

## What Grows Under a Curving

fishing line

cast into the river

tied down with wedding rings

tricks that make a meal

out of cupboard string

salt divine

caked into creases

knuckles work out

a worry knot

in the cast net

a once-was river bed

soaked muck

stone broken into stone is again stone

deify the spine and its ingenuity

for the face

everywhere is familiar

lingerie crumples,

arms loosed from their sockets

into silk puddles



labor toil

another throne collapses

several seas from here

maintain ether

the interior molten warmth

bring forth and what cannot be brought

there is never new water  
on the back of this world

### **Prayer of the Limb**

Reverence, be loud:  
raucous buzz, pop in muscles; a dance floor.

Be stretch.

Tight yawn and crank of crawl space  
behind my shoulder blades.

Be hush.

Naked-stare into the bedroom mirror  
after returning from the night.

Be firm, unyielding.

Peel others' palms  
from my thighs like sweaty spans.

O praise the pause—

leaves lit in yellow glow  
of porch lamp, left on.

## II.

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## **A Pink Mobile Home**

Women's lips.  
Framed and ranging from barely parted—  
just space enough to slip a strip of bacon in between  
the moist muscles                      painted pillows

to smiling—  
white bricks plastered together  
in neat rows a picket fence without a gate

to full gaping oh—  
canyon of want airbrushed free  
of saliva only warm dark.

Inside, there is pink carpet,  
seashells, faux wood paneling,

and more than forty pairs of lips.

Women's lips and a man alone with scissors,  
stacks of magazines,

tiny slivers of paper stuck to his shirt.  
*Labia oris* crush him in his sleep;

gloss drips over his swollen abdomen, seam of inner thigh,  
and stiffens. Each heated hue smears a mark.



## **I've Never Slept Well in the House My Father Built**

My knotted calf screeches in the middle

of the night, an outburst

against still air and footsteps

moving across the floor above me,  
quiet like a rock

moving through glass.

The room next to mine is filled with slave art;

the artifacts prove me culprit. I try to empty—

fixate on the curling notes of water

that percolate from somewhere beyond the yard and walls of stolen wood.

But moonlight drenches, rattles the room; harsh and rippled.

A stark god.

When I was small in the dark,

my bed spun on a dial

tree limbs blurred into arms, legs  
and strolled past the windows.

An army on the move.

## **Though the oyster is mostly a shell, it is whole**

Though you are mostly shell, you're whole.  
Though your two halves are only suctioned together for a brief while.  
Though your little mouth opens only a little it allows whole oceans.  
Though the oceans are tempered with water scrubbed clean of salt.  
Though you wait in splendid passivity for flecks of plankton, bacteria, organic matter,  
detritus.  
Though after every meal, you have another.  
Though the men with blue rubber-gloved hands barred me from the buckets full of  
bodies.  
Though daddy pulled me aside, showed me how to hold the knife, pry the animal open at  
the hinge.  
Though my blood crept over your oval body.  
Though you are a lump.  
Though you pop.  
Though at five and seven, I climbed shell mountains and chalk rose like steam.  
Though thousands of you being dumped from a truck sounds like river roar.  
Though I held and hold, the rocky exterior to my lips and dip carcass backwards  
slightly, sliding briny slug smooth down my throat.  
Though I can always slurp another.  
Though Sergius Orata bread you on the roof of his house; would place his Roman ear to  
the unbroken surface of the sulfur bath water, listen for gurgling.  
Though you gleam dully in pearl grey.  
Though you are really a clam, bivalve mollusk.  
Though I once believed you a snail.  
Though the old sea witch reads sweat, frayed rope in your face.  
Though I used to fear your slime, swallowing you alive.  
Though this is because a tourist hurled grey muck onto beach sand.  
Though you are a combination of rumor and change over time.  
Though you are ancient.  
Though you are bone. And mucus.  
Though you can be true, pearl. Thorny, pilgrim, saddle, and windowpane.  
Though I can barely distinguish an Apalachicola from a Calabash.  
Though there are shy shades of pink ridging your sides and a streak of green pulses  
across the meat of your center.  
Though one Christmas I glued your hollowed halves together to make angels; they hung  
crooked from red ribbon.  
Though your countenance is crooked and spiked and swirling.  
Though your death is dry.  
Though even alive you appear lifeless.  
Though your heart is three-chambered and must be smaller than my fingernail; it pumps  
steady and colorless.  
Though porcelain is inside of you.  
Though you drag yourself along the sea bottom on one slow, sucking foot.  
Though you only move when you are young, like most of us.  
Though my tongue must feel familial.

Though you must realize the betrayal.  
Though I once dreamed you grew large enough to gulp dozens of me.  
Though marsh reeds and bottom feeder is your only speech.  
Though you sing a mud-song.  
Though I wait to hear more.  
Though you ignore me and my advances.

## What Daddy Remembers

### III

one small problem

## Monticello

## Montisella

azaelas and boxwoods  
pecan and Tung orchards. the only paved roads were the two-lane  
federal highways

## shellacs and varnishes

bills paid in piglets, eggs or butter.  
 Mama gave birth to more

slow                      umbilical cord  
inside her.                      horrific  
As the old country



*A way to save it*

The pomegranate bought yesterday is  
putrid. It agitates the air.

Turn it into pie, cobbler  
or roast seeds for a supper garnish?  
*No.*

She raps the decision out across  
the dried rose rind. *Won't do.* A thump.  
Dead thud, a Satsuma hitting the wall

above her shoulder? Her heels bounce.  
A bobble-head in reverse. Clump of red

falling. *Leaves in summer?*  
the underside of her  
hair is damp against the landing  
strip of her neck and

last night he threw  
off even the sheets;  
the baby whined.

*Must be*

a cardinal at the window.

Smacked into glass full force, whole.

She wraps the stunned-still wings  
in a kitchen towel

as if the bird was wet from birth,

the red askew begins to squirm.

She carries the tremulous  
in swift strides  
to where the jasmine curls.  
*The fruit.*

*He will ask for the receipt.*

*Like the*

*it will be a knock*

*down*                      *drag out*  
Bundle released into  
                                 grass. Flight. Sky. Pine.  
Back to the rot,  
                                 puddle of pink leak

and again the green traverse.  
*Time enough before he*  
She digs

a grave, deposits the fruit carcass.  
Pats dirt down,

car keys clanging  
like a wind chime or  
cat collar bells.

*Time enough at least for a return trip to the grocery.*

## **Self-Compassion**

How does pleasure fall? Like a tree.  
Like an engine any kind of engine even a boat engine

she asks and answers.  
Out of spite we named it  
a crutch; a cushion. The texture

recalls green mist whispering up a hill  
spritze on your face as you are  
striding up and over

the incline. Which is more  
than an attempt to move into open.  
Cradle the ginger

taste of your own will;  
its bite.

## **Grazing**

Goats running up or down the narrow dirt road  
somewhere between a stampede and a trot,  
pulling at grasses as they go by in browns, whites, blacks.  
A man on a motorcycle directs them—  
chugs the rear: Ya. Ella, ella.

Goats beating their heads against rocks.  
Horns scrape against fences their legs  
are too short to jump.

Goats in grid deadlock  
on tiny patches of dull green. What's left of fields,  
everything eaten down to a narrow ledge.

Goats bleat their outrage over hands grabbing  
utters that drag full in the dirt.  
Pinch, tug at nipples.  
Snap at ears resting on their heaving sides.

Goats moving across a hill in a diagonal  
of ringing. Strangled lament of human-child cries  
erupt from mischief pointed faces,  
peal back the soft evening like an overripe banana.

Goats, champions of the mountain.  
Goats, a herd of wind chimes, a train of bells.  
Goats stand still.

## IV

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## What Kind of Cousin

Blur of pool and concrete; big hands grab bathing suit bottom. Quick like a fish, I dive down out of reach. Fear and something stranger, something tiled and exposed like when Morgan Sauls walked in on me on the toilet. I can sit on the vinyl floor long enough to scare, long enough to win. Blue light wavering in diamonds; clear enough to see the hair on his calves, tiny strings of pearls. *I've seen butts and vaginas before* he crouches on the precipice, the slope between shallow and deep. Pale skin. Daddy hollers from the porch and it's over, we get out. Chlorine-sputter; snot dribbles down my lips and chin. I pull my body from the water using the curved metal ladder as leverage, a shaky haul and suction like pulling the plug in a too full bathtub. We eat sandwiches. I know I'm better at swimming at holding my breath. Lungs extend their pink, press my ribs full of breath and bubbles.

## **If asked about my childhood**

I.

My shoulder churns, grinds in its socket.  
This is like a bone in a bowl circling around the rim, singing.  
Peer into my smooth vestibular,  
where time is balanced and kept at a distance.  
At the supper table,  
leg bouncing and sweat dripping,  
my father is shirtless.

II.

His thin chest hair is comical, arbitrary. I call him Daddy but cannot write it.  
He talks at the three inches of air between my right shoulder and earlobe.

III.

Circumnavigate the names of two hundred dark haired relatives; there is no center  
but a clamor swells,  
volleys over jostling heads.

Cousins do not end until they do  
disappear.  
I have crawled  
into the azalea thicket, turning petals into tongues.  
A they ends up wedged—

stretches a room out and sets up chairs, carpet, a coffee table.  
A chorus of beige and off-white. Such a house itches.  
The walls continue to hold, loyal, smelling of nothing;

except faintly, a trace of wet soil makes a curving start  
in-between my nose and throat, locus of scent and residue.

IV.

I remember learning  
  
from someone older what kind of pause means no,  
how to kiss convincingly, hold in my stomach.

The heftiest bet is always placed squarely

on the sleek body,  
who or whomever moves in the cleanest lines.

I've always wanted glory. A blue ribbon  
a wreath of roses.

My joints chirp not like a bird  
but a bat squeak, muffled whirl of wings.

## V

The television screen is a wet  
blur. It grinds my pupils  
into sediment grain, scatters  
Technicolor across my face,  
seeps in dyes &  
illuminates new escapes.

## VI

My hair eschewed mother's brush.  
In the bathroom mirror only

my forehead and eyes were visible,  
a receding horizon, bangs.

My whole everything held  
there between  
and under my brows.



## In His Own Image

Red stilettos bejeweled and sharp,  
glisten like blood running from the crown of thorns;  
Jesus is reborn.

Wrists turn slim, grace all  
and foot washing. Same thrill of Paul's calf  
but legs stockinged. A hot pink

mini-skirt can be salvation,  
thus spoke the deity. Jesus sashays  
divine, hips jut and his face  
is hairless. Cream.

Converts come easy, when your mouth is absurd,  
plush and your teased hair tall enough  
to touch God.  
Jesus preached

& gathered light into the hearts of men  
with his eyelids painted blue,

he can turn water into anything  
his eyelids are so blue  
over his brown salt of the earth eyes. Eyelid oceans,

Jesus winked Romans into  
kneeling. They bend  
in half over pool tables. Prostrate

for a dark pocket of song (lip sung or otherwise).  
*Circumcise your hearts, therefore and do not*

cheat at cards any longer. Still  
peace, earth, yes, love, yes, unto men,  
Jesus blows kisses.

## On a Walk With You, Whom I Like

Desire is a delayed promise  
but I don't really believe that. Demand pleasure anyways

in the still, torrential wood, the tender mulch, green moss.  
In walking: regular beat-sway of my feet and hips, forward  
movement, my knees working beneath me.

Pleasure in the air. How it pulses  
with fluttering insect call and response  
echoes. This is also the sound of the sun—

it's surface buzzing with heat like the back of my neck, tangled inside  
of my lower abdomen. Splotches rising along the coastline of my collarbone  
like washed up seaweed or a red algae bloom.

Tell me about your mother, what grade she teaches. How you remember her yellow  
hair cut short, prickly like dry grass. The fluted columns of your grandparents' colonial.  
And because you are gentle and brave you will tell it gently. While

I, cruel

Ruler of Remorselessness. Queen of Keeping It Cool.

I, afraid

Shaker in Boots. Calculator of Involved Risk.

will offer nothing in return but a comment on the moon, how pedestrian  
are its comings and goings.

## Logical Explanations

I'm certain everyone is sleeping with everyone but me.  
My blank space of inner forearm is bitter  
and sulks. It probably isn't personal. Like, I'm a decent,  
friendly sort who laughs  
and buys bananas every Sunday.

It must be because I'm incapable  
of polyamory; that and the abundance of coarse dark  
hair that grows under my chin and on the sides of my neck.  
What is up with that? I ask doctor

after doctor. Hirsutism: bringing you bearded  
women since the fall  
from paradise. *Nothing abnormal*; this could also be the problem.  
I go to bed too early, take my meals square.  
Zaina tells me to be more casual; people want people who don't care

about making a good impression. All I do is make good  
impressions. My tongue is cardboard.  
My skin is cardboard. My eyes are cardboard.  
The grocery store holds my romantic and sexual potential  
in its clean, waxed vise.

My flirtations are handfuls of marbles,  
round & clanking & translucent, or  
they are quick peripheral glances. I keep tabs  
but don't engage. I enjoy being ignored;  
I am a rusted hinge.

## Old With You

We will grow our hair long and wear silk,  
keep a garden. I will forgive your noisy  
body when we are spinsters together.  
You will rise at four in the morning to  
brew coffee and reorganize our library,  
mumble over the alphabet. I will  
smoke (which you will hate) & memorize birds—  
flash of a yellow-rumped warbler in our  
honeysuckle. We collect rainwater sweetened  
by the heady bloom, bathe in its cool perfume.  
You will go first. In summer. The after-  
noon sun a ball of butter melting  
across you. I will turn a hundred gourds  
into birdhouses, hang them in your room.

## **Citrus, Delicious**

Kumquats grow hot and round  
in wet, bright light. A patch  
of uninterrupted lawn or a coastline country  
that is long like a finger in sand.  
A toe-sized fruit  
does not need the acres  
of orchards dappling and dividing  
land into rows of miniature canopies.

## Headlines of Clippings My Father Mails Me

'I Said I Went to Heaven  
Because I Thought It Would Get Me  
Attention.' 100 Years of Coast to Coast

Calling, The Tape Never Lies An Ear  
to the Ground. Earth's Twins  
Spotted, Icicles Partially Obscure the View

of the Gulf, Weird Florida 2014:  
Fangate, naked crooks, Satanic  
Display; After Ivan: Rebirth Follows  
Tragedy. Our World  
Would

Be Different Without the Amazing Moon,  
The Power of Sleep. Pompeii

Scrolls Could Be  
Readable—  
Hindsight, the Exact  
Science. Study: Any Running

Helps People Elude  
Early Death. 'Selma' and  
Why, Half a Century  
Later, We're Still

Struggling with the 1960s, Debt: A Major  
Threat To Happy  
Retirement. Caught

in the Act, A Civil War  
Sisterhood of Undercover  
Women, Ready

To Stop Wearing  
Underwear? Golden Girl  
Shoots for Miss  
America Sunday—

Church Expresses New  
Acceptance of Gays, Divorce, Our  
Aging Nuclear Arsenal, Elite Horses. What

Happened to  
Anticipation? When

the People Talk...,  
From Top to  
Bottom, Baring All, Time  
Sits Still in Paris. Who  
wants to

live (or die) on  
Mars? 100 waiting  
in line. Melbourne Area, A Hotbed  
of Ancient Bones. Nobel. Women

Must Get Past  
Being 'Objects.' Our

Brain Sees a Bigger  
Moon Healing. Springs Still  
Draw People Who Believe Whole  
Grains Are Linked To

Longevity. Sure Don't  
Smell Like Tar, A Sneaky Snake—  
Teams Hunt for Rock

Pythons. In Everglades, All in  
the Swine of Duty. We Survive By  
Going On  
With Our Lives, Going  
Swimmingly.

## **This chicken is a monster**

claw talons, yellow-absurd  
scales curving out and under each  
other in lapping ripples, the metal  
scaloped legs of a raptor or dragon.  
what could be feather-tender is brittle  
at its core. collapses under pressure.  
there is only search and destroy:

eyes seek, head snaps, body hops,  
lurches, crashes over prey, thrusts  
in ancient kinetic impulse, jaws  
acute and wide and pitiless—

that screech is a roar,  
townspeople! flee the disturbed  
skin-rubber; wattles, combs, fleshy  
caruncles. Idle-eyes, stupid.



## What Daddy Remembers

V

a commotion in the hen house  
a flashlight and that German Mouser. aim  
red. She never missed. the carcasses of invaders  
dig a deep hole.  
I could see fire  
behind my mother's dress trouble  
but  
mama warned  
nowhere in the pasture taking care  
leave the henhouse full wire  
life pounding in back to the henhouse

## Manners

Yes sir I would say to the upstairs, offstage voice. Rolling  
t-shirts down the length of my body so they take up less space  
in your drawers. Yes sir I would say before closing

my bedroom then my closet door, cloaking myself  
in slated light. Fabrics hung  
around me like moss-shadow.

Yes sir I would say holding the nail still. The back of your hands  
muddied with age, crinkled like tissue paper.  
Don't slam, don't smack. Yes sir. You speak, you answer.

Withholding the truth? Just the same as lying.  
Yes sir. The laundry should be done in the time it takes  
you to drive your truck to the grocery store;

a mile and a quarter.  
I crouch to hold the screwdriver up to the front door,  
an offering to plea entrance.

The plunger is not clearing the striker, you explain,  
inspecting the knob torn loose  
from the wood, its mounting plate. And I would say yes sir.

### **A Hungry American Girl<sup>3</sup>**

walks wherever she goes.  
Licks the center of her palms

with a fat wide cow tongue. Her skin is pink,  
sticky. She is moist  
under her arms  
in the pockets between ribs.  
Thighs rub until they scrape skin against skin raw.  
She is never real in winter

as it is a waste of time.  
Must surround and fill herself

with stuff. Shoplifts tubes of Pink Pigeon  
and Damn Glamorous; saunters down department store aisles  
fingers taping hangers into plastic ripples.

Makes up  
three older siblings who live faraway and send presents  
just because they like to.

Languor's low  
bored, freckled, loud.  
Breaks out from  
humidity and cheap foundation, picks  
at the pus swelling.  
A girl with the stomach of a bear

a bear who lives off what's been thrown out—  
Chinese food, banana peels, freezer burned fish, other girls.  
She is entire ecosystems:

hormones ripple all down digestion  
a million bacteria  
tingle inside her ears  
tiny tails of cilia.  
Teases the bottom of her

lip like chewing gum. Nervous or working out the problem  
of evading her mother.

Kisses her own mouth in the mirror—

---

<sup>3</sup> This poem explores one kind of white girlhood in the US South.

cool glass cloying  
smooth and clear as water on her tongue.  
Blasphemes

and does not fear god as she was told to do. Under her bed,  
she hides  
copies of Cosmo, a fork, a half-hearted diary.

Decides it doesn't matter  
what she ends up doing as long as  
she is the best

or one of the best  
as long as people know  
who she is and she is famous and all that.  
Is only as good as she wants to be.

## **I Was Maybe Afraid of Her**

There is no entering  
such a fortress of steel.  
She gulps sea, downs  
what waves slosh up to her.

I watched her eat a lamb shank clean  
to the bone, her first taste of meat in three years—

teeth tearing the tough muscle, I could hear  
the tendons ripping. Gristle gone,  
chewed too. Grease smeared  
on her fresh cheek,  
small pieces of overcooked flesh

on her flesh  
clung like a fly  
on the flanks of a horse.

Between the agapanthus and basil,  
she buried the circle of bone.  
*Not for luck* she warned.

## Explaining You To Other People

I wish I could say that I was beyond you, the jokes,  
our postage stamp of mud-grass, the tall tales

starring you as the cowboy & the outlaw & the farmer  
& the solider & the inventor & the starving artist & the cuckold

& the pusher of envelopes & the freedom fighter  
& always the victim.

I wish I could shrug off  
the smiley faces made from square slices

of yellow cheese as a fluke. It would be  
easier to explain if we had stopped

talking when I was sixteen. If I had ever actually said  
anything to you, if you could listen, if you could be wrong.

I like to pretend that no part of me comes from you.  
But I guess I've learned from you.

Resolve, sweat, strong skills of recall:  
three hours spent on the side of the road

in the Florida summer sun practicing long  
division problems in my head. You knew I was smarter,

I was playing dumb. Reciting what you said word for  
word to prove I had been listening; spittle flecked

onto my grey cheeks from your face,  
a cherry tomato roasting. When I was

fourteen, you used a nail polish brush to varnish  
three long gator claws and made me a necklace. I loved it and

resented you, still not the monster  
I imagined you to be. How you predicted my taste

for taxidermy, a fascination with previous lives, previous  
deaths. I've watched you also

luxuriate in decay. What I want is a more  
simple hate, a story that ends.

## What Daddy Remembers

VI

a small child                      a mesh fence                      a lick  
run                      and with a rake or shovel  
ward him off  
Mama told  
daddy                      fierce and quick  
bellow                      beat  
his own blows in  
we moved to                      no  
night  
knew  
Mama would cook                      on  
the front porch preventing                      us                      wait by  
the front door                      and rattle it. I can still see  
all of us young'uns  
rattling that backdoor                      bellow                      and paw  
when we return                      home Mama                      careful                      we                      go  
one by one                      quiet  
in the old wringer

## Consanguinity

Ahhhh against my mother's long body—

varicose veins are raised rivers, leg's topography.

Hair swings in stripes:

the gradient soil readings mark shifts, rebirths.

Shirtsleeves warm with florals skim

the curl of my ear and then flap like miniature  
flags as she moves away,

loping soft in her height.

We have back to go. Remember,

we have back to go she says, turning her  
head to count the distance in birds.

I want to ask is it good

the weight of a child's rump,  
plump in your lap is it good, how good.

You smell like cosmos growing taller

than the year before.



**There are upward one million feral pigs in Florida.**

a dead pig is a good pig.  
they breed quick, grow fat quicker  
and roam, run rampant in all 67 counties.

they've been in Florida since Hernando de Soto.  
the Spanish came and left sow—  
somebody's been making bacon ever since.

golf course lawns are rooted raw  
all that pristine green turf  
turned up into mud slop.  
and citrus groves are ragged with tracks,

roots scraped by hooves. the right people  
get angry. and so we hunt them:

no season, no size limit,  
just a rifle and a pick-up

is all. only a fraction find their way to a plate  
because the USDA only believes in red tape and more  
red tape. most rot into carcass waste.

money could be made, but those squealers  
are a lot tougher to catch live with tails  
and ears still wiggling.

my brother can slaughter.  
even belongs to a small hunting club  
and uses their smoke house.

a whole pig is a lot to eat.

feral pork is not that farm-raised pink stuff  
no, this meat is dark, lean.  
grown up in that damp soil, kudzu-fed  
muscles turn tender.

hog road kill is regular now,  
especially on the dirt roads that wind rocky  
through the St. Joe paper company pineland.

occasionally I'll pull over, just to size em up.  
in July I got up close to a boar, dead two or three days,

a big one. I touched its spine  
not its face, the face was too gruesome too gone.  
long snout rippled with thick folds of rubber fat.

I've seen a group of 50 trot through a clearing. picture pigs  
on the beach, jumping in waves, gulls scawing  
at the scrap competition. reckon they can swim,  
how else could they cross all those swamps.

**I've begun to feel the scratchy interior of my skull and that is worrisome.**

I am both inside and outside of the kitchen,  
minced. The smell of my body is sweet  
sulfur, I waft and  
linger in the place I learned

everything I need to know.  
The currency of moving  
sideways, a corner  
country enough to monitor  
the inside colors, where  
they have leapt.

I'm alone and mama is a ghost alive.  
I see her at the stove,

mistook for a vapor.  
Salt in boiling water. Motion  
of steam. Her whole a breeze.  
I carry it in my arms,

the traces of pewter, leather, rain.  
The bones of a stone crab. Torn  
bits of her knee-skin left scraped  
onto pavement. I'm lead

by the crook in her nose,  
the rhythm of knives  
on cutting boards.

## Darwin's Doing

Awash with pious worship of biology,  
I come to myself in early evening  
like the whooping cranes  
taught to migrate with motors.

Even I can be fooled by accurate machinery.  
Naïve for ever expecting  
a metamorphosis, not a thing can be  
peace or honey dew. So it's no surprise I remain

the coral vine's bursting  
pink bite, gulping the porch of my father's house,  
a medusa, a hall of bones.

I want to inherit all of this earth,  
murder will be required—

a lover's lungs removed intact and thrumming on a silver plate,  
a living room painted red with the wet innards of rivals,  
an execution delivered by my own thumb and forefinger.

The carotid artery is vulnerable & strung  
along the jugular. I pinch it off.

Neither eviction nor evolution is clean. A thick sludge  
spreads over and out of me, moves soundless to steal  
from the dirt and the dark. I will eat god with salt.

**I can become my own with something more than joy<sup>4</sup>.**

I can turn green,  
green, green. Mosquitoes  
in the shade. Body; a flooded wilderness.  
But known, navigable—

out sprout hurricane lilies  
hatching from the loam  
like red spiders.

Pitcher plants hang low with throat-gut.  
Great tomb of rainfall, enzymes.

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<sup>4</sup> Title inspired by something Emerson Rhudy said.