

Aunts and Their Likenesses

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When It Happens Our Limbs Will Be Cool. She Will Lie On Top of Me And I Will Strain My Neck to Get At Her.

On a cold day the smell of haybale is soft

it is everywhere

and we forget it.

Soft as my ancestors' idea of hay.

And it is wet as morning out there. Nothing burns.

Cups designed like little hands

It will be bitter and
swiftly drunk. It will
be bitter
bitter it will be swiftly
drunk. The
workings such
as you might
involve
a non-arthritic
knuckle to get
the lower
half good
and dry, tamped
in, clean. This isn't
the last pot
she used
in the house.
In good
condition, and mine
now: decades-old
residue
of decades of
her mornings.
She'll be
so swift and
heraldic
again in me. If
she should know, she
already does: the most
interesting thing
left about me, among
eclectic
and shamefacedly young
aluminum utensils. All night
all nights, she'll invite
me to sit
with her: one
lamp on, and
slate beneath
the table. The water will
boil unbitten
and my vision
will widen until she
is a wondrous
narrow

thing in my expansive
sights, offering
it to me: dense,
and white,
in the whole limited
and comprehensive
as china –“you
take it
strong?” She’ll watch
me watch the dregs
grow fine
and skim across the
bottom “I
remembered” of
the cup. “Black
beautiful” someone
will hum where
no one
should see the other
blush. Waiting for
her in the black tang
to begin
my story the great-
great-
great-grandmother
brewing at the morning
and the cup
was riding safe
between her
palms into—into—how
did it end? Still
more night, or
flight
into bitten
morning? “Take it
strong,”
to set
your mouth around her
voice
in the window
her voice unlike
the cloud shadow
alighting, whim
over everything.

Lois Ann

They moved her to the memory ward this week. It wasn't
much: she and her blankets, the Shakespeare
she holds between her palms between her

legs. I'm not useful for the lifting so I walked
in front of the wheelchair so she could
see me and I could look over

my shoulder at her and the nurse would
smile at me when Lois
didn't. Grant had been by, she said. Smiled that. He doesn't

return my voicemails about the spare key and
my garage full of his mother's
books, which people keep returning to every

place that seems convenient but my hands.
I don't think he's going to ask about the
journals. He seems

patient enough: he hasn't watched a woman unlearn
to read before. She doesn't look
my way. Her ready tongue. Her hours.

Thornless Common Honeylocust

Smell the woods, keep
quiet, sleep like it's all beginning again. At last –no,
it's not begun again; at last that doesn't do

you pain. It does no pain –it does no
pain to think of her finger
pacing your insides. You dream like a sailor. I dream

like a journalist. Sit under the tree
like the flickering end of a chrysanthemum
firework. She'll come, she'll take you to climb that tetanus

nightmare of a snail, laugh at the pigwolves
in the clouds, the elfhorses under pine trees, to look
at each other one at a time. You may only remember

letting the silence pass through you going home
in the dark, how she pressed herself into the hug, but I
was watching. Smell the woods, keep quiet, sleep.

We Have Nothing to Fear But Your Fears

No one opened their windows
to hear someone out there

no ceiling fan fallen, fingers
fractioned on the neck passed over
by the shirt wadded offering

thrown back on uncaged blades
your blood who've gone
now and for ever a man
will pour cold water
and the hearts of small-
hearted animals (chicken,
field mice, platypi) over
and over and onto my wooden

bedroom floors. I have craned
to the better part of a moon

learned in what you were in the night.

When I did not say love

From outside myself I saw
my torso, (not
beyond) nude,

symmetrical, ending
in two purple scars pursed
want

on my shoulders. The arms
grew back, lost
over and over. They did not belong

on this body, though I had imagined
otherwise. But how sad

to regrow part of a wrist and have it disappear

so many times. Where were my arms? How,
how could I bury them now?

Ghosts I: Montage

Recalled
your
smile six
times

before
lunch
Now I

add
a looped
clip First

you
smile and
I

stay away
stay away

kiss you
o-
ver and
o-

stay away

ver and
you're
so

gentle
please

stay away

don't leave
me
again.

Why I Did Not Tell You I Had Been Raped the Previous Autumn

You had wanted to see

horses, dry land in
miniature.

What I like about this memory

is that so few of the details will surprise you. Wesley
was the brat you know him still to be. You can already imagine
the whole thing, "Cape Lookout," that day.

I was amazed. That's why I was silent
in the fishing boat. The ordinary color,
its slowness, the vertical drama of our path proof
we were all going to die—

I'd not been farther
than I could swim
before.

Last week you sent
me a message,
*I hope your
week is going
well. Thanks for
calling on our
anniversary,
your daddy
originally forgot,
I miss my
daddy*

You have my attention.

I thought of my own secrets. He
gripped the silver rail
and breathed through his nose. You may
not miss him this way, but I believe
that nose is still there. In the memory
and in our own times. The medicine stayed
down. *Please*

the pale red stripe
in the shell falling into the warm
high tide

do not cremate my body

you asked me, *please try
to smile*. I promise you: it was a fine day,
and you could not have done better.

A Shot

and a minute later the man was out of the driver's
seat with his flannel off, shouting *does anyone*
have a first aid kit can somebody

help please and someone called an ambulance while
the man's friend sat with the shirt wrapped like a mistake is

wrapped over the hand and she wouldn't keep it above her head kept
putting it between her legs on the bench and unclenching

her jaw and the man knelt beside her looking
into the busted passenger side window how it just *went off*

It just went off it just and left the glass intact
with a wrecked cobweb threaded in the frame no

shards, no cuts by the brow pulled blinking
from the Honda out into the dog park we were wailing

and flashing as all the animals stood up
and the woman counted each of them.

songs

6. The time spent in reading or writing

give us grace

7.

our Constitutions oblige us to pray so many hours a day

I am ignorant

For You, D.P.

I do not trust their word. I trust the word, which is swift
and astounding as butterfly migration. I don't know whom

you raped, which is testament to the discipline and aptitude
of the believers. In case you considered yourself innocent

until proven guilty, I am here to instill in you
the fear of God, staring you down in the street, walking
as if through you and your untuned ukulele. Have you heard

a voice whisper *fucker* when you come up for air
ten laps into your breaststroke? Mine. And I am not

alone. Our work is unfinished until you cease to walk
with your head up.

I Wish I Weren't Alive In This Decade

But there is nowhere for me to go. Only the very wealthy
are able to travel into the future. We live in the same town

after all those months I called Blount Street
the corridor to your house. Now

you are the beech tree and the way I hang
by the pits of my knees from its shrug branches
and all I see from its cracked shrug branches.

Now you are in my hammock, literally: where you might

remember you are not weightless. You don't have to say
anything to me about that. My head and legs

throb. That's all I feel now. You may keep lying there
as long as you like.

Where Credit Is Due

I like a man who ducks and shields himself from a Frisbee.

I like a man who stutters.

I like a man who asks me to write a book about Beckett with him.

I like a man who prefers to dance alone, and says so.

I like dogs that sniff each other calmly.

I like a man who prints in round letters.

I like a man in rubber soles.

I like a man with curvy hips.

I like it when all the dogs at the park stand up at once.

I like a man who throws an armload of leaves
over his head. I like it how they stick to his hat and shirt.

I like a bald man.

Not all bald men.

I like a man who is voluptuous.

I like a man who wants a garden.

I like a man who is learning to play the piano.

I like a man who does not want to watch.

I like a man who does not own a watch.

I like a man with long floppy ears.

I like a man who listens to Sleater-Kinney.

I like a man who proposes marriage the first time he goes down.

I like a man who practices temperance.

I like a man whose vagina is strong, and knows it.

I like a man who owns a sheet of stickers.

I like a man who makes gratuitous lists.

I like several men at once.

I like a man who'll pay me to repair his bicycle.

I like a man who can't name half the U.S. Presidents.

I like a man who asks me to help open a jar.

I like a man who dreams about chasing cats and squirrels and geese and moles.

I like a man who used to be an anarchist.

I like a man who means it if he bows.

Take the J Bus. You May Keep It.

From here, it looks like that woman with the short hair is leaning over the man in the gray shirt. How he leans back in his chair, and she's looking up, but at the woman across from her with the same model of hair, just another year and color. The reason most people I knew before I moved here thought I was the worst is that I would point that cool thing out and swear I'd not have been confused about what was going on across the café if only the man were leaning forward with the same easy expression, and the woman were below him and looked a little stupid,

maybe alarmed. Do you know any of those people? I've seen the older woman on the bus, only I switched to the CW route last month. All I know is we commute east at the same time of morning, which is kind of cool to think about—So, remember that OK Cupid date I told you about, with the comic book girl? Well, she started riding the J when I stopped returning her messages, so when I'm not walking I take the CW. The world gets smaller and smaller, no matter how often you move: the two quiet bars in town, Saturday mornings at the community garden, a new roommate-- Which is fine. She can have the J bus, but I don't want her to see me, or where I get on and off.

Ghosts II: Evidence

Run behind the lumber warehouse and the nursery
mornings and up the hill past the trailer park you can
hardly see but you can hear the highway. It's bad
for my posture to look so long at the ground. They see you
no matter where you look. But they don't mess
with ghosts. And you might find red leaves, squirrel
tail. Treasure. They will reach with their hands and go straight through you.

I know they have no imagination. What they would do
on top of me is the same every time, it's what I do next
that's always changing. Checking their books out in the library.
Buying them a mug for their birthday. Avoiding

the grocery store. There's something stupid
about speaking after all this time. How it never happens
when I'm here. And the stupid way people like
the knife. That I have one that's small and fits
on a key chain. How would I get a hand free

I have no idea over and over again my arm
is an extension of the knife which cannot resist the logic
and charisma of the eye. Pounds of body out of my socket over
and up. Once I am free and sprinting home I am on the ground again
with one free arm and a sissy knife. Nobody

has told me what comes next. I remember lots
of different things. Greenway smells. A bathtub I wished
would turn red. There are things my legs can do
at prayer to rend speed from desire, from safety, arrival.

A Bad Influence

I wonder what I really want with you,
little man inflexible, behind the want

to prove we share this quiet you're busy
making like the paperbrown leaf in my hand

taken apart by segments
and by soulless excitement. Now

all my words are skin
and lint confecting

the air, *nephew*,
you unhouse me, always

what I wish to say is terrible,
I mean to say that you are beautiful

the way a jar full of pig's teeth
is a threat –without doubt. Tell me

what you think threats
have to do with the roots you know

like balance-beams, and the breakneck
canopy, the whole thing suspended

before the euphoric moment of
clasping is called a canopy,

do you know this place every
day was my refuge to the last

of the sunlight? What I mean is we
are here, which may belong to us both.

Night After a Funeral

no one alone
in the dark. He
only went down to
the kitchen,

hearing
Grant, Grant, so
no, not really

alone in the
curtains, waiting
and hearing
everything

the breath measured
on his tongue, even that
he can
hear, though

the walls should
hold it. Trace one's
length, the calluses

that seem unable to depart
whispering into them in the light
through the cherrywood
doorframe and the light

blue carpet, why should I
bear the sacred knowledge
why should I bear witness?

Sufficient Conditions III

8.

you imagine

the Sun within this palace

9. A soul gives itself

wander at will through the rooms of the castle,

perfect

its hive

it is a great grace from God to practise self-examination,

earth that we are.

10. I do not know whether I have put this clearly;

heaven I would not have you careless
while on earth

you may be lifted to

enter first by the room where humility is practised,
This is the right road;

to endeavour to

I believe we shall never learn to know

His

His

His

11.

we turn from ourselves

Buddy Sonnet

Because I've sung a great love poem with you,
befuddled streets, because the sound had no
direction, object, you are dear to me,
who've heard the grave and read the fleeting thoughts
each day how many months? You know I'm not
accustomed to this, keeping on my clothes
before one so important person as,
admit it, pal, yourself. You've seen the parts
I'm still afraid to flaunt: the man behind
the misandry, the slut who talks a big
sex-negative game. Your thoughts, too, return
to how we're wrong, or how we've wronged,
like hounds that make their peace with she-wolves, stones
that dread to miss the magnet's pull.

The Skin Permits

The sunshade to trickle
over your neck through the warp
and weft of magnolia leaves: departure

the warbles and after them a pursuit
following you out of the house for good
after a decade sum of hibernation and husband

out of the house with the last
living slate kitchen floor under

the world's magnolia roof for good;
following something urgent

in your creeping blindness over the gutter
imposing the dark places before

your warbles. The dusty room
inside the pigiron pot inside the

outdoor closet under the gutter
with the small blind handglances

against the sky. Arranging the room
as it was near the sea. Just above,

as the cabin of a boat is out of the sky
and the posterity of pursuit.

Ghosts III: Erotica

Trusted in a rhythm
that does not flinch at close
calls, but sees one car

pulling against another
unmarked friction that lifts

skirts, the radio missing
an antenna since

Roanoke Rapids' mills
fell with the rain

the red line into
forest that followed a car
across okra fields

that cooks for the aunt
on weekdays, and sees her

sees her bathed, that learns
aluminum foil, craft
and withering, that steals

and is not death, is not
there on weekdays, not touched

by the withering, not by
baptism, that is lost

in the next town, for the roads have changed,
that drinks only milkshakes,

that knew he was gone when the car
caught on fire, that takes

Alka Seltzer from
before we were born,

that only knows how to care, care,
and thinks she's fallen in love
with each mortal thing.

In the Second Language of Her Thought

You might not feel this way
and I understand because you
were not her lover, were you? No, I was sure

of what she would say and then she said it. I do
think she is a promising scholar. She
would not believe that about me, how much

how much I think of her. Before we were
over she even accused me
of belittling her, not calling her stupid but

calling her thoughts into the
shadows of my own. And of course I never would say
that to a lover. I always

always told her how much more
the creative mind was the realm

clear sharp pane of her

wit. She had my most profound respect
when she swayed and the Bach washed
over me while I watched her. This paper

I'm sure is new to you but to me it is a memory –
the thesis is so like
something she would suggest to me
before we fell asleep, or I to her.

I Am Happy—It Is My Birthday

What comes later I would not trust even
I will choose often
not to heed advice from anyone

who has no sympathy for
romantics. It will be merely interesting.

Robbing the Grave of a Single Bone

I left because there are many beautiful things in the world.
I could not count the number of things I cheated, were I to choose you over
all other beautiful things in the world.

I did not leave because there is something wrong with you. Stop:
stop saying there is.

It doesn't matter whether you would prefer to be lied to. That is
not your decision to make.

You can only tell someone they're a creative genius so
many times before they realize you're
calling them stupid. No,

no matter how stupid they are. Afterward, you can't get away
with saying much to their face.

I wish I could be happy with you. I still wish I could be happy with you.

In the First Language of Your Thought

In the first language of your thought
I know you could be just as angry
As you caress what seems to be me

In the first language of your thought, each verb
slightly irregular: an alloy of vowel sounds
in only one part of the paradigm. There are no cacophonous

nouns, none. The beating of wings the pure intellect
of your arousal. Your pincushion.
Your fretting. Your chest lifting my back as I shuddered
into sleep. Your long toenails. Your hair

your hair. When we would dream together I heard
some of those words. That is why I ask.

Blind old age

some mornings I wake

the television is still on
and has grime on its teeth

but what a sweet
film I watched when I woke
in the night
his voice, asound
in air

what wakes me

watched in the night

fingers seek lips, stumble
against a chin

Clark Gable's voice, pulling
trouble into tiny proportions.

some mornings
I wake, the television
played two films
back to back

and I heard the women quarrel
who'd pause to listen
to Mr. Gable, as if

no one's face in the night

he sang to the line
of sunlight behind
the window-drapes

he were a strain of music.

and see I
; I this
the number of venomous reptile
souls They resemble
eyes clogged and half closed with dust.

blind the eyes of the
beginner .

16. so
preoccupied with earthly honours and affairs,
it sincerely wishes to enter into itself

as
compatible with the duties of one's state of life,
ever to reach the principal room,

bitten some time by the
creatures surrounding him.

17. What then would come , if, after
having escaped into the
more secret mansion, she should, , return to all this turmoil?

In our convents we are free from these exterior evils;

18. my daughters,
all
mansions of this castle ,
the powers of the soul,
arts, He
creeps in numberless ways,
until late.

19. he works like a file

For instance: a nun has such a longing as to feel no peace she is
torment herself suppose that the Prioress

Twice

the suspicion you've
caught me wiping my
glasses with pools of
lemon tea and silver
nearby on the ground

have you lived by the sea

what reaches the eye

rain waters, a leaf
the relentless air

that you came here once
slow while I blinked and
swayed another such

echoless day

Apologetic

You think I've died? Saying my name aloud
to remind me you
are just what I used to be: capable

of a sympathy that runs
on detritus, does not move
the whole world. No,

I am not dead, though I make a racket
with the shower curtain, though I stack

prodigious, cryptic dozens of books
on the living room floor
each night. The open mouth

you took to mean reverie? You
have not heard me moaning, oh, all

these minutes—I cannot tell you
why. But do not say that name again
to me. Listen: I hear

everything in this house, and so
at any time could you, who like myself
are mortal.

Get to Work

Loved ones bravely
take responsibility
when this
among all things that hid

I did myself. One will write
a poem about subway lines
without dirt in it,
and a poem about dream
catchers. I did not know

there was a correct way
to violate the
taboo of skin. Anyone
who has stared
their mortality down

will know my fraudulence. It's easier
to write "my mom grew up
poor; I grew up poor" than to see

strangers flinch at my upturned
palms. What I did was a gesture
only I have found mysterious.

Jocasta

There are some things I can't
say with certainty to you. They

should die before they fall
out of me conspicuously. I thought

I'd lost you. Now who alive
but you knows the scents and

qualities of light from the happiest
month of my life? You might be

asleep like a defiant child
pretending to nap with one lid

raised until it isn't, and the afternoon
diminishes under his belly, light

from the window only sweetening
his feet. I had a child

once, but take none of this
from distant memory.

I pull myself past the blankets to you and breathe all night long.

Surface Tension

Mornings are optimistic. I don't
see portents while everything
seems to begin around me. The buses,
deliveries, the rain – I love
their fate. I love their fate for them.

News of your departure will fall
from such a height it breaks
every bone of its body in me. I've come
apart in your hands so
many times you can do it and leave

me arranged. Meanwhile
across town weeds
and cousins of
weeds you assigned
to your pocket–

your body and its minerals
the silence in your vestibule the
spare threads of separation
the intervals of the faucet
and the curtains:

may they all be well.
The actual recedes
at night. You
you could be hid
and frightened anywhere
in the invisible clutter.

Lyric and Arrangement

order of the shadows
and tree of two hearts

I am in your balance now
and the birds are back there is glamour

in the middle of the day
between the tree's
hearts: the tree's mind
and the tree's heart

glamour, and order
also, light

Nag

You used to beat my dead
horse and hold me in your
beansprout arms. We mourned each
other to sleep and woke
in the sweet manetangle.
Nothing hurt. You didn't
hurt me and the horse
doesn't feel like a human. When
someone stands up and holds themselves
in front of the projector in the horse's
eye –those people
look up for trouble and tear
me apart of you.
Nobody is crying.
I would touch you now if you
stopped offering to replace my horse.
It's not even sad: the horse
with the shit in her hooves
and no more eyes following
the helmeted woman into the stable
door closing behind them
both while the house lights
open their eyes for good this
time and the audience
straggles into its coats and the daylight
street where nobody has been
beaten, not in a long time, and nobody's
trying to walk home faster
than you, five-lunged hummingbird, breathe

smashfoot jockey, breathe rat
catcher, like you don't expect a shot.

The Librariantiphon

Someone has thought this and it is not worn

/To be opposed is to be accepted

and folded/

as a fold is acceptance

/the reference fold to make crane or make

dog's ear the smell inside

finding letters in the warm

thick tissues/

I can say this any way

/I hope nobody cuts your head off

and fries you/

I hope nobody catches me you're right

my spine is narrow.

/We are so many/

We are peering between

/Still more/

It Chooses

You As Consciousness

Is Harnessed to Flesh

/Even if one's feelings are

fit to the task/

What if I hurt you?

/Off to the bindery/

Off to the furnace

/You are barbaric and

how I like that/

I like

that this is allusive

/And you've heard my

mind/

premeditated, unwhisperable

comfort

/not a secret

language/

you can change your mind

/by leaving by opening/

not the furnace; manifold

/openings are answerable

to my mind/

It Chooses

You As Consciousness

/folds across its

back its face/

coins, petals, armor, arguments,

real numbers, windows
/nothing keeps the light
out of my bedroom/
you wake up sweaty all
year long I think
/those aren't letters/
but they might be evil
/wrong for me to say how I/
want
/you dog-eared, fried, headless/
you may keep my head.

I Wanted To Make You a Necklace

So, I looked it up: there is no difference
between warm-blooded bones and cold ones –now that
it's late summer the literal balances the cool

and the cold blood thrives behind the bark.
I let it out at the belly by
the way they hang, and am

covered in shadows and
thin copious poisons. So much will grow here
a couple of springs from now.

All the animals
foam at the orifices I make
when I bathe them sweet

in peroxide. To put my hands
to work like this for you
takes days, peering down the ballast

slope –all I want
is a spinal cord's memorial: to thread
a pretty leather string

through a pair of rabbit vertebrae. I bury and wait
because you're quick and fright
leaps across your blood

to the brain. I would have liked, I think,
to live with you in a
place that's quiet

and dark like here, behind the bark.
Beneath the ballast and the blood. Somewhere
precalcified.

Inheriting My Low Weight

Wondering was I in danger
or actually dying in my
mother's bomber jacket and standing
late after school in the girl's

bathroom with my hands so
cold I remember them
blue under the hot
water and saying whatever

to the wonder
I've never been cold like this before
to my own--let's say it—pain, whatever
happens I'm not living past sixteen, become

Faust enough without the weight
of the stately
things I'd do on a baker's floor or each
storm on Saturn my ancestors couldn't finish

appease or vanish with their deserving mouths,
that it feels the opposite of a soul—if I'd
just think of it in that way, like a soul, what
do I know, that light

and the next one and the next
one reflected in the floor no one's
taught me a lesson against, that jarring
across the face like the moment

before a kiss by which I hold myself
up, nuclear secrets
traded for a piece of fruit a glance another
girl. Why deny myself a shield.

Husband

It would help if you'd tell me
the first thing, what would you like
to know about him? He was
funny, like your uncle, a
monkey up the magnolia
dressed in football pads sitting
in a submarine. I raised sons
in a box hanging on a lead
-painted windowsill looking
over San Francisco. In movies
about the late 'sixties
everyone is talking about outer space.
I did not talk about outer space. The sun
warming your skin
was eerie enough. I bought
five pounds of coffee-flavored candy
and drove with everything
we owned in the Volkswagen
in boxes. It was fields,
cornfields each morning
my head ached with the sun.
I would not have lived
my life if I had known it then.
That he'd come to the East
coast whole, he was like
any husband. On the weekends
he sailed. And so
much of my life would be
without him. Something
I had so early, young
in a way terrible
to remember. It hurts
to say he was my own.

Sufficient Conditions V

20. the mutual affection of the nuns, . Be sure, my daughters, true perfection consists in the love of and our ,

21. let each one look to herself. I here will only beg you to remember the necessity of mutual affection.

Sometimes the devil tempts nuns in this way about the Prioress, which is still more .

to keep silence for fear that speech would be a temptation against charity, would be that very temptation itself.

22. However, I must warn you seriously not to talk to each other about such things, lest the devil deceive you.

Thank God our custom here of keeping almost perpetual silence , still, it is well to stand ever on our guard.

Attachment Theory

What a day. I like sticking my head
in the freezer with you. Let's do this forever. Ever,
being the preferred occult
vernacular for the sun

has it moved all these hours at all? Would you
put your hand on top of the
fridge now? Let me get in your armpit.
Sometimes I shrink in the freezer. See how

skinny my fingers are? Like one marble
left in the bag. Yours, too. Only
they're so much bigger than mine. You aren't
stretching your arms all the way out,

pantingly; aren't you afraid I can't
see what you're showing me oh
they're lovely, hard things. The person
who made them must have been a real

scavenger, nobody
fitted hands with nails this shade
of purple after the early nineteen-
seventies...Does that mean you're

sick? Count with me, no
the sun's still right on top of your neighbor's
car, just like when we opened the freezer
all those weeks ago: three,

two, one, no, two—
one—sheep!
Listen to that wooly thing run all
over your living room, and I'm

so small on account of the freezer,
but we made that. No, I smell it,
too: frozen potatoes, ice cream,
is my nose cold? I'll put it back.

Words, Deeds

You said yourself
I could host a square dance
in my bedroom.

Who shall stand
on the bed and cry

allemande your buddy
allemande allemande

your shoulder turned
and whole as looking
frank and polite beside mine.

The floor is clean enough.

We could do it.