



The  
Night  
Gown  
and other poems

Taisia Kitaiskaia







**Qaissia Kitaiskaiq**

## PRAISE FOR TAISIA KITAISKAIA

“For fans of Taisia Kitaiskaia’s previous books, I’m here to tell you her poetry debut is every bit as wild, witchy, and visionary as you could have hoped. In *The Nightgown*, Taisia’s ongoing exploration of the folklore of the self voyages into exciting new territory. Prepare to step inside a menagerie of evil potatoes and misbehaving angels, imaginary gardens and real toads. It’s an experience as beguiling as a wedding ceremony you never fully learn the rules to. This book left me completely drunk and I don’t regret it and neither will you.”

—Dobby Gibson, *Little Glass Planet*

“What do you expect to see when you look deeply into the foreign wounds on your body? Taisia shows you how to descend into the tender bog, how to relish the unknown creatures brushing past you, and ... Please, don’t be alarmed when her poem guides your hand to draw a card that speaks too loud. It is only your friend, your shadow, waiting for you to break the ice.”

—Jiyoon Lee, *Foreigner’s Folly*

“Fairytales are grim creatures, part teeth, part terror, but nevertheless, too seductive to resist. Taisia’s poems ‘crawl out from the river’ like a nymph, to offer that poisoned apple, of which I gladly bite, in search of ‘that imaginary orgasm.’”

—mónica teresa ortiz, *muted blood*

“*The Nightgown* is not the ethereal, diaphanous sleeping frock of fairytales. It’s carnal, fleshly. Its angels have hairy fingers. A soul is a thing you can pet. There’s lots of butter, meat, glasses of milk. The love is strenuous, and the impossible starves on. The only thing these poems have in common with fairytales is their dark brain and crepuscular faces. I’m ensorcelled by their logic, which is soluble in its own sentences (and the syllogisms are

such: if you're ravished by a rabbit, you've been rabbished, haha). The poems read like stories, but they are not going forward to an end—they are going backward, into the history of their own words. In one poem, the writer asks if she can be a man of God and the poem ends ‘the little wormings, I do love’—ahh, yes!—not the book she is writing, or the words, but the insects that eat them, which, of course, in these poems of Anglo-Saxon meatiness are called wormings. I loved the words in these poems. Where oh where, Taisia Kitaiskaia, did you get those nouns!? What big texture you have! It would be perfect if this book’s cover were made of human hair, and we could stroke it as we read.”

—Darcie Dennigan, *Palace of Subatomic Bliss*

“Taisia’s poems make you think of the poem as an apothecary’s pill ... without being able to verify its true origins, and getting only some encrypted apothecary verse that provides only the faintest suggestion of what elements the pill might even contain, you take it anyway, you trust it almost completely ... a pill presented ever neatly, yet ominously, to you in the palm of your hand, a pill that appears to encapsulate an entire psychosomatic experience. Taisia’s fablesque poems come from this faraway place, or, rather, a place we are made to believe is faraway but is really just close enough to have heard enough news of civilization’s operas. To read these poems, we must walk along a trail that moves from idyllic to horrific and then back again in the pace of a gallop before we reach the door to the apothecary who will gift us that pill, equal parts restorative and poison. It is this tension between that which is presented tenderly and that which menacingly refuses total encapsulation, which makes the most lanuginous of us curl up at the base of the rocking chair and ask the storyteller for ‘another one!’ again and again.

—Valerie Hsiung, *You & Me Forever*

# The Nightgown

## and Other Poems



Taisia Kitaiskaia



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for my parents

# CONTENTS

The Folklore  
The Hurt Opera  
My Time with the Angels  
My Evil Twin  
Hour of Monks  
The Nightgown  
Time Is a Bride  
Thumbelina  
Wept All Day, Didn't Know Why  
Eunuch  
Lady Butter  
The Hobbler  
The Priest  
High Priestess  
Our Lady of the Ropes  
Tapestry with Maiden  
Hierophant  
Kroshechka Havroshechka  
Hermit  
Then Always the Sea  
Rabbitcatcher of My Moods  
Many Lives  
Can I Be a Man of God?  
Nothing Scares Me  
A Small Man Gathers Twigs in the Black Hour  
Reader  
Twelve Days of Wedding  
Everyone Is Welcome at a Wedding  
Blood Hare

Because I Am a Thick Broad  
Husband, I Am a Scary Cauldron  
The Wild Freedom of Being Unloved  
Saturday Evening  
Should We Have a Baby?  
I Visit My Oracle  
Speak Plainly! (A Demand)  
She Spits & Touches Her Tongue to Her Lungs  
Anglo-Saxon  
Solacer  
Anglo-Saxon (2)  
What Do Asparagus Dream of? They Dream of Blood  
Goodnight, Soliloquoy  
The Miracle Smacked Me  
No Ifs or Buts, Only Ands  
Song of My Self-Loathing (Part One)  
The Ministry of Crows  
My Evil Potato  
Origin Story  
Poverty Bucket  
Bog People  
Administrative Assistant  
Nightwalk  
Cryptozoology  
Reader (2)

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# The Nightgown and Other Poems

## THE FOLKLORE

Shortly after crawling from the river, the folklore  
Died of pernicious diseases. Died upside down  
In our wishing well, showing its bloomers.  
Someone spat on the folklore. Someone dipped  
The folklore, like a candle, in lye. Someone  
Washed the folklore's corpse. Someone put  
The folklore under a sun lamp, but the folklore  
Did not revive. When I next saw the folklore,  
It was filing papers in a basement office,  
Trying to tip the vending machine over, loving  
The salty and the sweet. I shook out all the snacks,  
Now I am the ugly wife of the folklore, we kiss  
Our ugly faces together, clammy. We go out  
For ice cream, we love apples, we hold hands  
Under the table. We eat peanuts, wipe grease  
On our skirts, get married over and over. We  
Are tipsy in the hot afternoon, swaying along  
With the sunflowers. Once a year the folklore  
Rides away on a little pig, I weep in our manor,  
I shield my eyes with straw. Then the folklore  
Comes back with beads, honeycombs, GigaPets,  
We are in love again. Knocking against each other,  
Lurking in each other's dreams like sharks.  
We go to the natural history museum, disappear  
Into the tanned cloaks of extinct peoples. We,  
Too, are extinct and rolling down a hill, scooped  
By grass. How much longer can we go on living,

Dying, seeking the other in each inherited world.  
When you, the folklore, first swam towards me,  
You grabbed my ankles, you heaved yourself  
Onto the banks, onto me. Dripping, we began.

## THE HURT OPERA

The opera kneels all night  
In her desperate colors  
On the kitchen floor.

Bruised, ancient opera.

Her inky sap drips down  
Spring's fresh glass.

Like an insect, she can't  
Be trained. The dentist says

Her fillings, made of tiny crushed  
Flies, must be replaced: *She* says

That's how she likes them.  
Dingy, mean opera.

When she makes me dinner,  
There is no love between us,  
Only eels,

Still alive in their butter  
And anger. On walks,  
The opera pulls cold turnips

Straight from the ground,  
Watches my face as she bites,

As if to say, Yes,

*I came from your raw  
Dark pocket, but I shall live  
Without you as a monk*

*Lives without water.* Scary  
Opera. Stingy, lean opera.

I am just a simple man.  
I hold her head when it leaks,  
And call out when she shrinks

Smaller than her name  
In encyclopedia.

## MY TIME WITH THE ANGELS

I climbed the beanstalk, up and up, to the realm  
Of pendulous curtains. The angels hid, emerged  
With grape jelly hands, long black hair, greening  
Toenails. One angel relieved itself, glaring at me  
Erstwhile. The angels stooped in the same linen  
They'd worn for millennia, traveling over road-  
Tongues that could retract at any moment, gather  
The angels into balls; contraptions created, of course,  
By the angels, who schemed with their abaci. When  
Wanting love, the angels prodded each other with bristly  
Sticks. They had one field with a children's kitchen,  
Little plastic melons and bananas, plastic toast  
With butter. Regularly an angel forayed, sat down  
In a tiny chair and tried to halve a melon or spread  
Butter as the other angels laughed, hooting, pointing,  
The kitchen angel turning red under unwashed hair.  
Nevertheless every angel in the community visited  
The kitchen once a year, or such were my calculations.  
The angels had a herd of shrubs, often missing; one  
Was suicidal. The angels had a criminal odor, but  
It was unclear if they had no laws or many. Nightly  
They poured milk into a dirty glass and squatted  
Around to watch me drink. The milk was repulsive—  
It came from the shrubs' teats—but I was afraid of  
The angels then, their grunting and burning. For years  
After my time with the angels, I felt compelled to do  
Things I loathed, like watch movies starring Cate

Blanchett, because the angels, living through me, knew  
Cate to be a truer angel than they, and were ashamed.  
In my extensive scholarship on angels, I argue  
That shame and rebellion are integral to the angels,  
But these publications were pressured by tenure,  
I don't believe a word. Once I had drunk the milk,  
An angel would always reach in and fish a black fly  
From the glass bottom with a single hairy finger,  
Either to save the creature for my next humiliation,  
Or perhaps as an apology, I could never be sure.

## MY EVIL TWIN

I feel nostalgic for my evil twin. He used  
To lurk around my yard like a goblin,  
Sticking his head into bags of leaves.  
We worked for the government together,  
That's how we met. Weird we didn't  
Meet earlier, but the twin was like that.  
He had a name like "Laredo" or "Marshall"  
Or "Le Faz," I could never keep track.  
He'd show up to Christmas and spit  
In the pudding. He loved to blowdry  
His tender bits at the dinner table.  
(What was he doing to keep them so  
Moist, breeding caterpillars?) I stopped  
Inviting him, of course, but he followed  
Me around like a moon-faced armadillo  
Through heaps of light. Heaps! He liked  
To carry marshmallows in his handbag  
Like a typical child. He was in love  
With me, that was the worst thing about it.  
His love and my repulsion made a sewer  
In which dolphins swam, growing grimmer  
Daily until they stopped smiling altogether.  
Plus, I was tired of the grind. Working  
In an office, stapling memos to my back  
Like an ancient Egyptian. Merciless,  
Merciless! That's the world and its lashes,  
Said the twin, and he got that much right.

But the twin only made things worse.  
His pots and pans always gleaming  
With clean urine, his toadstools ever ready  
With unkind wisecracks. My twin, he  
Disastered all over the place, tricking  
Pretty baristas into going a-blimping  
With him, and then lo-and-behold,  
There he'd be, jumping blimp, leaving  
The barista to fend for herself in the clouds.  
I grew tireder and tireder, it was time  
To do something. With great resignation,  
I wrapped my twin up with twine and  
Gifted him to a large, wealthy family  
Who mistook him for a clever goose,  
The kind that can nanny your children.  
Fair enough. I wept then, not for him  
But for the aimless struggle of my life,  
The never-good-nor-badness of it,  
Like a thick smear of paint over lips  
Trying to eat a grape. Like lying in a  
Ghost's belly and all the alarm clocks  
Are going off, but the ghost doesn't  
Give a damn. It's a miracle anyone  
Has ever looked at you or drawn your  
Profile on a napkin. I'm going to order  
An entire cherry pie, and when the waitress  
Kicks me out at half-past midnight,  
I'll leak what remains of my spirit  
Into this glass of milk, my criminal  
Powder a poison that makes the waitress  
Glow radioactive when she steals a sip,

And when we meet on the other side,  
Maybe the twin can solve my murder.

## HOUR OF MONKS

The monks drink their silence wine.  
No one watches them.  
They could fall asleep facedown in a hill  
And no one would know.  
I would like some butter with my bread.  
I will eat dark bread and think about the lone monk  
Lying facedown on a green hill.

A fox approaches him.  
The fox sniffs.  
I look away as the fox does the other things it will do.

The monk lies silent as bread.  
The monk is terrible and small.

Whatever the monk believed, we believe him.  
No one believes the fox.  
No one believes my dark bread and glass of milk.  
My house this morning is a green hill  
And my bread is black, the color of earth and speed.  
My eye is black and the house is black as bread.

The monk lies sleeping in the dead.  
His monk brothers drink wine in silence.

I am small.  
I am actually a child.

The silence has made humps in my shoulders.

Whatever the earth is,  
It is much better to eat dark bread  
And think on what it was.

It is enough to make the brain dark.

## THE NIGHTGOWN

Rabbits have bitten holes in my nightgown,  
Which have only made her more sensuous. I am  
A sensuous housewife, candles everywhere are dying  
To see me naked. But I'm never naked, there's always  
A thick eye deep inside me, recording and reporting  
To the other planets. I wear my nightgown in the daytime  
Out of stubbornness and resentment. I unhinge elegant,  
Fatal formulas in my notebooks; the nightgown glares  
With her many heads. I watch my mystery novels, eat,  
I peruse, I harbor sandwiches, I am lofty. My lovers  
Waltz on my nightgown, we float on my nightgown's  
Boat. One of my organs is a meaningless word,  
Such as PARABOLA. It itched itself into my regions,  
A boomerang in my lung branches, electric with grief.  
This is a story about my nightgown, who is riding  
The elevator. Your attentions to my nightgown have not  
Gone unnoticed, but beware, she has a canid's loyalty  
And jaws. Just yesterday she sat up on her hind legs  
To frighten me. My malice rises daily, it will drench  
The nightgown with black bile. Lovers bring flowers  
To my nightgown and she is naïve, she believes everything.  
She is plain as a pail, perhaps she has a secret dowry.  
It is hard to imagine someone kissing the nightgown,  
But the impossible starves on. Meanwhile I strive  
In the corner over my formulas. My regions are aflame,  
I've had to remove the PARABOLA with tweezers,  
Place it on a saucer. The nightgown gobbled it instantly.

She is a monster, she should be locked up. She is fat  
With PARABOLA. She winces as she walks. Her moods  
Consume this house, spit it out as a TV programme  
Called “My Troubles.” I rarely see the nightgown anymore,  
But still her anger rams into me with a thousand sturgeons.  
The nightgown is the last of me, she was also my first.

## TIME IS A BRIDE

Married to the woods. Once,  
A man grabbed her by the Talk—  
Her only knowing. Thereafter, she  
Grew tall, the hills were nothing—  
Loomings, the doom was in her.  
She pet her *sāwol* on Sundays.

There is no wandering ache  
In fairy tales. They have the look  
Of history: sealed as fruit, born  
And beared, away. And words  
Can be so round, she thought,  
Givable, and in a basket. Carried  
To a crone, not for comfort

But for Being. She was a *lītel* story,  
On a pony bright and white as she,  
Alone, and uncaring of this, ultimately.  
All day long she kneaded a Myth—  
Fragrant, though she never tasted it.  
*All Myths are saltless*, she moaned,  
And listened for what happened next.

Sometimes she dressed up in Fame.  
She lit up the woods in her flameless  
Costume. No one saw. She liked her well  
Of clear, cold water turning dark. Knots

Were interesting to her, and knives to cut  
Them with. The mind, a knuckle to be  
Gnawed. Flesh and bone, no secrets at all.

Her mynde was Work.  
Her beings were her own.

## THUMBELINA

*after Yuliya Lanina's music box "Thumbelina"*

Thumbelina is a racehorse, muddy, bloody,  
Rolling in and out on the Toad's tongue,

A joy-diamond for the choking. Lanuginous  
Bride. Planeterium howl

Wounding summer's bark. Walks into a room  
And everyone surges out their feet,

Crabs or flowers scraping down the drain.  
*Approach, approach on your pretty paws*

Says the mole, the beetle, and Thumb comes  
Like an aneurism, a chandelier

Plugged into the wedding's socket, booming  
Tulips. You're a wish, Thumb,

Even your mother stands at your rainbow's  
End like a dark, abandoned hut ...

Run, my Diamond, before the Toad swallows!  
You're tiny to carry, tiny your cry,

An insect seizing her reason  
For the first time—a sound

Of no consequence to giraffes,  
Chewing the moon's soft yogurt with blind lips.

## WEPT ALL DAY, DIDN'T KNOW WHY

Saints are those who do not live amongst the people.

When I first met a saint I placed it tenderly between  
Two halves of a sandwich and left it to the wolves. Suchly  
Did I observe that no animals came to eat it. At last  
One deer pawed the sandwich and nibbled the bread.  
Some birds came over to hold a slice up to the sky  
Like a banner announcing God's glory. By this time

The saint was unclothed with its face in the dirt.

I felt sorry &

Shut it back into its walnut shell. I whispered sweet  
Gospels. I made a proper burial for it on my tongue.  
For a saint must die in its own language. Then

I was like, Okay, and drove home

In my imaginary vehicle splattered with bird droppings.  
I became small from crying. A pulley system geared  
Until it snowed inside of me. Good grief I said. It was time  
To bring my hands together over a woman's body and worship.  
Time to turn off all the faucets God had forgotten about.

Long is my journey to all the empty restaurants crammed into a walnut  
shell.

Irreversible is my decision to eat the browned defeated apple  
On my way to the bathroom. Now nobody knows me. Not even God  
Knows me, He who pares his fingernails my whole life long.

Like the saints I will now be stingy with my love &

Pave a road out of myself so it may be traveled by those  
Hungry for bread. Night, reckon us back into the original loom.  
Braid our hair into the branches so we cannot move,  
So we may be happy.

If you see a saint in the road please put it back.

## EUNUCH

He is a caveat in the glut of it. A thumbprint.  
Omnivore with nothing to eat, he folds his hands.  
He steps one foot, then another, into a pair  
Of hairy vowels, gets stuck. It's the little  
Stitches that hurt most, it's the buttons.  
Language is blind, a worm threading in and out.  
Unleashed unto him was a violent piety, a herd  
Of suckling pigs splattering and swelling him.  
Great Wrongs and Mercy did hold him down,  
And he never got up from where he lay,  
The wood darkened under him night and night.  
Language moves by feeling; it finds unseeing  
Holes. His wound not dim but distant, a lightbulb  
Left in a closet, from which he coughs. He watches  
A virgin exit the church. Her beauty is a single  
Plump word squealing in between the pews,  
Leaving behind a sticky streak, marmalade or dew.

## LADY BUTTER

Her hand a country  
Where women are fools  
In harrowing bonnets,  
Only dreams can pursue them.

Winter bullied her, forced  
A finger in her, made her

His wife, so that nobody  
Could touch her. When crowned,  
She magnified her wand

Into a mirror, caught what wind  
And wired it shut. Her nature  
Balloonied in a cave of iniquity,

So beautiful  
Windows closed at her arrival  
And true became truest  
Just by looking at her.

Her *her* a burr, the burr of her.

The waiting & bleeding  
Trembled her over, the monster  
Of her and her might—  
Origin Unknown.

A man with no business wearing a hat  
Got lost in the woods, and took her:

Her names were Luxury, Glory,  
Little Worm. She carved a carriage  
And suffocated in sated sleep.

What a dull, what a little dull, what  
A dull little being she was.  
It is not up to us, who lives in the window.  
Her mongrel's puddled drool a portal

To nowhere. Afraid to move, afraid  
Of her body with its bells and chambers, echoing.

## THE HOBBLER

Call the Hobbler, that crude hive, spilked  
Large in hoard and deed, heath hoared  
And shoveled, hair bathed in gravel, mead.

Hobbler, will you bake in your mind  
A speechcake? The beginning of life  
Palpitates in you, milds. The Hobbler

Frightens children; she is hungry as grass.  
But she bears treats for us, her maw-sighs  
Make a stinging symphony. The Hobbler

Is a princess, too: her cats, the Minkles,  
Commune with trash, and she watches  
TV through their aluminum antennae.

How joyous it is to be the Hobbler!  
She rides a moose into the garden and thinks,  
And everything she watches thinks, too.

When night comes, she is cold and blue.  
Every morning, she lives again. Her true  
Wonder, though, is this: No one made her.

Neither in space nor sky nor soil was she born  
To mother or father. She boiled from her own brain  
Once—and spoke, and then spoke again.

## THE PRIEST

He listened to an opera called, “The small  
Hole through which I watch you.” His hands  
Smelled like medicine. Some dangerous thing  
Approached, or maybe he was just hungry,  
A spear in his belly. He was always the Least  
In the room, he simpled his hair in the mirror,  
Wishing and washing the wish in a dirty creek;  
The wood of her, he wanted to unlock it,  
For her watery mane like a pitcher poured  
Mournings into him from swollen stars. His  
Serious self wore a turtling light out on the town,  
And he so honest he never took his shoes off, even  
Before God,—but it was the Being he was after,  
The Be spinning on empty fruit dishes when no  
One was looking, though he got up earlier  
Everyday to catch it, and he wanted the key  
To turn in him too and bring the spill of pungent  
Tarred language, lit. Years later he realized  
He’d already buried it alive, the Language,  
Without meaning to,—but it had followed him  
around so, sweating into his collar and bringing all  
The wrong women (no She), and when it was near  
His mind wept and held conferences with armoires  
—And when it was gone, he let the lightwood  
Of himself go up in flames, adding his own  
Pollution to the thick of the already-dinge,  
Shooting down whatever bird was most plentiful.

## HIGH PRIESTESS

God split me and fried a snake down my middle,  
In plain view of me which gasped, in oil. He  
Tore the serpent tongue, boiled and chewed it,

Littered the cup, drunk walking, the dew closed  
Its eyes when God yelled. Meanwhile, the snake  
Digested dragonflies and moths. He aged

Jealous as a river. Wanting coins, wanting sleep.  
He jawed my kneecap and sucked my marrow  
Until a grass patch grew up his brain and pierced

The skull. His eyes famished & ants ate of him.  
At this point I was two days old. Itch of insects  
Inside cleaning the corpse. For a year I drank

Sugar water with strenuous love. A pig carried  
Me to the next clearing. A green taste in my mouth.  
Tongue green, blood green. I saw everything

Is a sheep standing in pasture, sunwarm and rank.  
Straw. The good grass people. Whirrings in wood.  
In my cupboard, I took out the good pitcher.

## OUR LADY OF THE ROPES

Her mind roped idle inside its sore bonnet,  
Harnessed a sphere to catch fire the woods  
And so famished a wreath around her, good

Clearing for dinner. She lassoed loss—its  
Big spoony eyes and body large as pasture—  
And crunched that cricket in between her teeth.

How she rode the haunted carapace then!  
Her sunflower-eating brain unhooking its dress,  
Crawling mad, unbuttoned, through history's

Rotten math. And hurting to see it so, her mind  
Begged to be out, then feared to be homeless,  
Didn't want that begging—Instead, she washed

The burnt land careful from a silk pail. Thinkers  
Bloomed, generous as mud! Holding shoes up  
To their ears to hear her message, which is thus:

*I say to the ache  
In ache's mouth,  
I say to the ache  
In armor, I say  
Take the armor*

*Off, peek flat-out into mine own heart.*

## TAPESTRY WITH MAIDEN

My braids swim  
With moat alligators  
Who love such tinsel  
Brushing their backs.  
My beauty is mechanical,  
A hairless clock or hairy  
Cabinet. My mood purples  
In a stable. None dare  
Approach unless beastly,  
Chaliced, jewel groined.  
I am processioned by rats,  
We walk into a country  
Of men who eat live fish  
And trees who sink  
Into the soil at night.  
Queen wants me look up  
At her from the cloth.  
Rather eat my own rag.  
My mind is wet, I touch it.

## HIEROPHANT

The Hierophant has six legs. Octopus legs,  
Mare-riding-into-the-gloomy-sunset legs.  
He visits in shawls, he is a woman. Come  
Have a quail egg, he says, Come have a bear  
In the shape of a duck. Duck transmogrified,  
With antlers... All day long little umbrellas  
Of doubt settle on him and populate his back.

On holidays he says, “I am shovel implanted  
In the Lord’s forehead.” Then sings, polar bear  
Taking a bath, ant wandering his own spine.  
The similes are smiles crawling his dead body,  
He picks them off. Surrounded by the evil  
Language, he loses one leg hair at a time.

## KROSHECHKA HAVROSHECHKA

*after Yuliya Lanina's music box "Kroshechka Havroshechka"*

I wish you a snout, a dead fish coat  
So stinky no one will touch you.  
Teach you to fry evil eyes in a pan.  
Grant you a taste for plunderage,  
Milk down the chin. But even the fish  
Coat weeps, looking at you: A child  
Smuggled from plural winter, a girl  
Tossed out from thrashing nurseries.  
Hostile geometry. Georgic sorrows.  
Tail scraped, nailed to the barn.  
So I became a medicine storm. Gave  
You a hiding place between my ears.  
Stepped into my own murder basin  
So Prince might eat my bone fruit.  
Still you fall through the Great Yawn.  
Cow is a hide pinned open to passing  
Winds, the unshut eye of the cosmos.  
My language marks your forehead—  
The hoofprint blinks with perceptive  
Rain. Even now, I am working on you.

## HERMIT

Hermit is twig house and black tiger  
Blood, circulating. Daily he unhooks  
Sun from sun as a crow does. Soups  
Tickbites for supper. Bleeds all night  
For the revolving suns, for the sound  
Of lichen growing on another continent.  
Hermit heats his kettle of salamanders.  
He was born in this robe of dust, milk,  
Where fish swim and peek out his collar.  
A wandered sheep said to him: Spooky.  
Hot strange Monkey plays piccolo  
In his forest. And Brother Snow-Crab  
Climbs a mountain, weeping, no one  
Has ever seen him...Hermit is twigs,  
Tiger bread, and a little knife of love.

## THEN ALWAYS THE SEA

Always anger, like a shovel, left in the yard overnight;  
Always someone's cat, dead under a heap;  
Always a gnome crossing the castle lawn, counting his whiskers;  
His money made from old shoes, stolen and gilded;  
Always a rooster in the wagon, hiding, keen to capture;  
Always a lady, wary of capture, pinned to the grass;  
The sea full of rings, the sea full of itself and other people's hair,  
And the worms in the earth watching us, the sound turned off;  
The sea trapped in its own body, randy, despised in a new wig;  
Hallelujah, say the children, who have grown and are waking,  
Their toes and skin in place, and nothing missing;  
Something sloshing through them, briny, not of themselves;  
The sea carrying diseases, mangy as a dog, rising, never crashing;  
The children under one fur, black and lustrous as lawn,  
The gnome petting;  
If the sea can't stop  
Looking in the children's mirror, riding their ponies,  
Slapping their limits, washing their caves, making marrow  
Of their femurs, handprints where their hands should be,  
Filling their towers;  
Then always the sea, and the panther's fur;  
Always the myth, placenta in the panther's mouth;  
Buried, tamped down in the yard;  
The children go still as a party, and back to sleep;  
The painting goes on, shifting her roots, her branches.

## RABBITCATCHER OF MY MOODS

There is no such one and no hat from which  
The rabbits come. And who are the rabbits  
Anyway who leap so elegantly through all  
My hoops and lassoes. Once, abundance.  
Then, hollow. What robes do I wear. Does nothing  
Remain. How do I be brave in the face of it.  
Stand here with my hands lifted and take it.  
I know it will come. I know my heart is the shape  
Of the devil's tongue. That he wants to plunge  
His tongue into my chest I know. And here come  
The locomotives: toy train of shame, train of lust,  
And the train that runs me down every time.  
I have to be planted in the springbeds to wake up.  
But I must do a gratitude dance for jam and butter,  
Toast and peaches, love and hats, rats and makeup,  
Licks, pits, tits, bright buses, showers, arrogance.  
O fulsome gulp I bow down to you. You rabbished  
Me in the hidden woods and I became the genius  
Of the cabbage patch. You pull on my sleeve:  
Sometimes nothing in there, sometimes bloodsigh,  
Sea gardens. My stunning begged bedraggled moon  
Followed me out of bed where I've been spooned  
And sucked into a song for days. Become a dazzle,  
Hot burner on the stove. Spring cracked me open  
Like a sprout. No time for undelight. I need  
Reigns but who will hold them? Rabbits don't  
Have hands and neither do I. Out of my sleeves

Came nothing again. I have one basket only  
And lay eggs just once a year. The rest I sleep.

## MANY LIVES

Married to the butcher I grew happy on meats,  
Marinating in juice when meeting neighbors.  
They thought I smelled good, licked the salt  
Off my arms. Next was poaching a robin's egg  
To marry the chick inside once its blue-green  
Eye-rings subsided. Jealous rage, jealous rage  
Of the sea filled my mouth with bitter. Then  
There was a hold on me of indisputable calm.  
I married the baker's daughter after a fortnight  
Of chasing her slow through Elysian fields  
On quiet fire. Maidens carried water beacons  
To me, I was loved in my belief that angels  
Are dead yetis revived. I bled all over the place  
And was deemed virgin. Finally, I wed a boar  
Who trampled my hands until they became  
Transparent, useless for anything besides  
Magnification of butterflies and other such  
Nonsense, grave nonsense. All my many lives  
Grew into my feet like bamboo, and I worried  
They wouldn't like me once they reached  
My heart, which had sailed away on a ship  
Of bombast, of frankincense and myrrh.  
Preached unto myself and consecrated, I  
Wore veils and pig snouts round my wrists,  
Christened and astonished by various wiles,  
Helped and stewed, long beautiful hair flowing  
Out of the tips of my hair, for I was perfect,

For blank and moving people came from far  
And wide to touch my face for luck and grief.

## CAN I BE A MAN OF GOD?

I've been drinking from the wrong cup.  
Cup of gold for a king to sip  
Till his insides gild and soul pebbles.

Deep green, potion  
Me over.

Deprivation, too, soaks the soil:  
Strange bulbs waddle up.

My praise boat dissolves in the river.

My staircases lose squires.

No one will suffer  
Absent my creeping.

The milk marshes,  
My eyes jewel,  
Breakfast calls me to the window

Where birds take residence

In my chest  
And the little wormings, I do love.

## NOTHING SCARES ME

Like my parents' death, so I made this horse  
Out of spit and childhood scribblings  
And he warbles in his branches.

Washing dishes,  
He wears an apron with a window  
To the lawn

Where phosphorescents leap.  
The horse is  
Sad, is mine.

The future opens me, a cabinet  
For a horse to put his head inside  
And lick.

Mama, Papa, I would whittle  
My ribs into rollercoasters for you  
To ride down the death hole,

If you would like  
You could live inside the horse's skull—  
*Are you trying to kill me?* —My mother's

Laughter tumbles with death's  
Good clothes in the dryer  
Down the hall from where I sleep.

## A SMALL MAN GATHERS TWIGS IN THE BLACK HOUR

Mothers came out to hang up linens for the bats  
To wear as wedding dresses. We were watching  
TV and eating plaster, thinking about the storms  
Our ancestors wore into battle to protect their wives  
And bars of soap. For dinner we boiled a mad  
Man's shoes in milk; the questions wound around  
His ankles made strings in the soup. We turned  
Off all the lights, as the hail was coming and our  
Carapaces were ready for take off into space  
Where we would surely be met by pleasant tribes  
Offering us our own heads. I loosed my tongue  
Into the streets where it wanders to this day  
In its many coats, unused to being cold and alone.  
Sitting on a park bench, then gathering twigs.

## READER

I am a swineherd; I herd a black ocean  
Today. The Only ships in me, and I am sunk.

Hooded reader, your puzzlement is  
A brilliant net with which to catch many fishes.  
May your head be one of the caught and carried

Home. Have you traveled in a winecasket  
This long night? I arrive, Century-dead,  
In the hallway where the Language hangs

On hooks. Reader, do not torture the wind.  
Captive, it shifts in a barrel out at sea.  
Slowly dying, it turns its dark, cogent mind.

## TWELVE DAYS OF WEDDING

How you grow my hairs from your own body.  
How you pull them out until I am nothing.  
How my love transpires into wind.

At the deep of me is a graveyard of live  
Cabbages. The cabbages are so good,  
Especially in the sea hour. Their scales

Slink dangerous as your feral cat garden.  
Our wedding gifts have long, worn monkey  
Arms, they swat from the branches.

The antelopes in my eyes feed and feed  
On your beauty. Your beauty is catching,  
All my antelopes are on fire and ruined.

The future wears furs,  
Carries an icicle.  
Open her robe,

And you'll see her body is a dull knife,  
Her heart a bell jar beating with a clock.  
She bites us open, my cabbages moan

And swim back to the sea. I have no dead  
Yet, my net teems with splendid fish.  
It is heavy to have so much, heavy  
To eat so many feasts before they spoil.

## EVERYONE IS WELCOME AT A WEDDING

Nerves shark up my loved ones' pistils.  
Would that they were barnacle-armoured.  
I live in a creamy ramekin, I touch no one,  
My ramekin is a UFO, it charms, calls out  
The slithery wolves: Bring me my goblets.

Death is making my friends sassy  
Enraged flowers, red spiky sewer-mad,  
Seasick and rocking the feast table.  
Loss was an old man who looked like a father,  
And it was cold out, so they let him in.

I too will age: small wounds on my body  
Will open into larger wounds, I will take  
Showers for all the wrong reasons.  
And yet I will have made a little lake,  
Each year-juice spilling in: Look!  
Even now a sturgeon leaps from it.

My love and I marry in two days. Death  
Can't touch us now. Can only tip his glass  
To us at the bar as we wine in our finery—  
O it was all worth it for eating creams  
In our finery!—and we toast him back,  
As he looks a little like my father, and how  
I miss my father, wish he were here.

## BLOOD HARE

Now that I am married, I go  
To the water and suffer

At its feet. The water is a beaked thing,  
Very serious.

What of the little world covered in wounds?  
What of the summer I slept on?  
The winter is vast

And behind us. It misses us  
And waves.

Blood hare  
Is what it means to have one's dearest  
People far away, and many imposters near.  
One peers deeply into irrelevant cuts  
And boils on one's hands.

My youth is a severed hand! It bleeds  
Gloriously, then shovels its own grave!  
I've given up the mood

And the window is dull as porridge.  
You see,

I have made a career of mishearings  
And sink my most precious statues

In the bog.

## BECAUSE I AM A THICK BROAD

How now will the King, forthwith grown legion?  
Where will I my pastries, with which fat to become?

I took the garbage out, and ate it well  
With raccoons envying by and by.

The pain everywhere evaporateth and becometh  
None: How could anything ever go wrong,  
Now that I am married, and have birthed my third

Toad? Sweet are my toad suppers into the moonlight.  
Tough are the stalks of the Matriarch  
In childhood grass now growing again.  
Fever in the loins of horses doth fuel my lust

This summerwide. Where do you think I now,  
Back damp with mud dimming the morning Stars?

(No one beckoned once—horrors ensued—I loved whores  
Of nonsense and painterly Europe—the piecemeal troubled—  
The Lord, miffed with me, did soften his eyes for a season,  
Such making immutable wrongs rope with blood my body—)

But all is over now.

So Why in the reckoning did you bring me hither  
To this here cookout, and did your head come off  
Seeing bees in someone's backyard of feelings?

A silent space to sit with you and be hungry now  
After blubbering my way through pith and toil  
In a sieve of meat, my love, Immortal

And I tell the truth.

## HUSBAND, I AM A SCARY CAULDRON

All I ever wanted was to be a thing on fire  
You could put out in the sink. I put my face  
Inside the word *poor* and lay there till crustacean.

Now I am happy to be your cactus. I have little  
Cactus dreams, and troubling nightmares I telegraph  
To Pope through a passageway in my flowerpot;  
We luncheon there, in the tunnel betwixt—  
“How was your supper yesteryear?” “Doingly,  
And yours?” “Too much blood I suppose, well.”

I lick the walls of my limitations; I love them  
As I love you. You and I both taste like plaster,  
The mice inside the plaster, and the ghosts inside  
The mice. Lucky to be dead, lucky to have lived.  
I commissioned Mayor Goblin to hammer us

Into a locket. Now all we need is a root vegetable  
Fairy to take us to the marriage station. My mother  
Places her soul over our eyes and says, Be well,  
Be well. My heart decomposes at the rate of a whale’s.

Husband, you are the doll’s house I crawl into  
And the grass loud on fire outside. The dog laps  
At the fire; it is his belly sufficed. I am taller than  
I’ve ever been but I can hear everyone’s cancer  
Growing. We wake nightly and are barely bodied,

Or slim bodied, or silver bodied, or are branches  
In the silver streets. In the morning I will feel better.

## THE WILD FREEDOM OF BEING UNLOVED

By day, I am a PraiseBeast and my mouth is wet.  
I eat all the cakes: they were made for me:  
Everything was: there is no other way.

Down in my Thinkies,  
I think.  
Tending

The little seeds, I grow a peasant  
Bottom amongst expensive onions

And meat. My dog is sad eternal, therefore  
I sleep. And before sleep,

I have the kind of dream  
I can hide under a pot  
When the husband gets home.

I feel widow-like,  
The *Is* is bitter today.

It is unfair to be so glamorous. “*She fainted  
And passed away under the burden of much envy,*”  
Wrote all the reputable sources,

But Ah! they wrote in vain. They should have said,  
“She sweated much.

And once found a spacehole connecting us to God.  
Whispering there nightly,  
*Tell me about the crests and rivers,*

*Tell me I am a medieval queen,*  
*Tell me about the ankle tongs and the clad,*  
*Tell me true and brave,*  
All the while kneeling down.”

## SATURDAY EVENING

It's itching out, my feet are raining.  
My Magellan sank into the soil long ago, cracked the earth's egg.  
I am a ferocious brood, my milk has fed an army.  
Only my arrogance can save me, it gleams in the dark.  
Waking nightly I am too large for my house.  
There are giants in the dry creek, swinging  
Their arms as they stroll, muscles taut with purpose.  
They have already won the earth, and no one knows.  
I want to tell everyone,  
Wake you up,  
Your torso splitting with kitchen light,  
Your glasses crooked, lens fractured,  
Hot milk burning your throat.  
I love you, it is very clear.  
I'll follow you, we'll keep chasing each other.  
The call in the dark and the call.  
Labyrinths rising and thickening,  
We can demolish them later.  
And always peace in the ancient tile  
House. My husband, you gold  
Round locket with no hinge,  
No inside, just the whole.

## SHOULD WE HAVE A BABY?

I've made a hawk of my every cell:  
Beaks pointed at you, they rush forward.  
Husbands and wives is a long road to dinner  
On winter.  
How dark the dark is in the dark.  
They lean their heads into the windshield,  
Half full of sleep.  
I've only ever been two eyes and a jaw,  
The rest of me a cloak.  
A robe always open  
Like a brain blown out.  
They are straining towards what is coming,  
What is coming is snow.  
A tongue should curl them,  
Live them in Most Forgotten Alaska.  
How small they look.  
I have no control over anything.  
Somebody dropped a watch in the tundra,  
My blood beats in its face.  
At the house, you put your hands up my cloak  
Where my body should be.  
The absence thrills,  
Like stepping into ice where a river  
And then fire is.

## I VISIT MY ORACLE

By me, I mean the Thousand-Eyed Beast,  
Lacquered, tumoured, and nailed—shapely.  
By woods, I mean Arachnoids, lecherous,  
Starved, transparent. By her, I mean big  
As a moon, Miss Moorage, eyes resting  
In the usual milk, dusty-Brain'd so that I  
Must wipe it, so that she may aspire  
For me a word into the glass goblet—  
Stir it, gelatinous, into a Meaning.

Tenders, governs, she does, says I am  
Too hasty to make a herd of Languages.  
*Decease!* She says into a pot, and they  
Drop and mewl. *How conscious*, she says,  
Muttering, *Too conscious*—it's all too much  
For her. She slides back into her slipper,  
Crunches insects eyelessly in a tavern.

I go home galoshed, stank all up my being,  
Far from oracled, my haruspex a minx,  
When at woods' edge I trip over a loosed  
Burl of a word (how did she trap me so,  
Cobwebbed as she is?)—and moment, feel  
Me step through myself—but that's a lie,  
And the trees snicker like they never knew me.

## SPEAK PLAINLY! (A DEMAND)

I speak plain: good  
Night. Supper is on.  
Aurora masterpieces  
My hair: lifts it once  
Like a little summer, cup  
My smell, nose in it.  
Ear, I've discovered, is  
A storm to enter, no  
Return. Ordinary meals  
Made me who I am  
Plus occasional fish  
Skull spilling eye. I  
Speak plain: as bald  
Wind in a bald house  
Quieting bald children.  
Every journey is an  
Egg to fall asleep in  
So the earth quakes.  
Beg of me a word so  
Vibracious, I can't—

## SHE SPITS & TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO HER LUNGS

I was outside myself, picking corn in a tall shadow,  
When I was ordained to be an Anglo-Saxon  
Warrior making my head from my own head, making  
An extraordinary instrument from which we shall  
All suffer madly. And the mirror was always a jewel,  
And the jewel is a spun armor of living tigers, who  
Clamber out and slurp your oyster heart, a task  
To be shouldered by barbarous cardinals,  
And in thick-smirched, burning loams of carpentry  
I was castled to be a moat woman in my own  
Brain: when mice come in, she runs out: the worlds  
Are large, the openings small and this big fish  
In herself is what she is, this vision, this fishling  
Gold, the seventh and the big fool and she does  
Eat the meat and she does not uncreature  
Herself at any point of the calendar, she is a tall  
Seamstress thinking doomingly, she a brave loss,  
And did you brilliant the flies making swimming  
Dialect at your feet, did you subtract from your eyes  
Heavy spoons placed upon the mood-mood,  
Did you crouch down holy in the you of you,  
Did you crouch, did the crouching make a crackle  
And did long-suffering beads crowd themselves  
Into your dark dream sockets? I am under duress  
Of flames but believe you me that certain flowers  
Toss their rings into nighttime and so become  
Crowned by ancient unseen kings in the halo

Where my genius did roam and wear little  
Inkles, and the animals have eaten my numbers.

## ANGLO-SAXON

Dear moss murk.  
Dead dazzle moon.  
Better than any orphrey,  
Osier, or oubliette.  
Thrall town:  
Day curse:  
I wive you.  
Dark other in my deep,  
Every whip of you  
Is a good bleed.  
Your mood-spear  
Eyes me, reads me.  
Each ask, ash,  
Gathers me under  
As a sooth ache.  
Sieve me your ear.  
Feed me your eat.  
Tread on my sorrow  
Until it stones, blinds,  
Clothed in your oath.  
Your death root  
Pins me gut to earth.  
You are the think  
Thorning me. Your  
Weight my deed.  
Nothing weeps me  
Like your spring.

## SOLACER

Each English word hoards spitted  
Fishbones from a dungeon supper.  
Language wrenches, tongues me,  
Scyllas my backspine for a wig,  
Vertebra crown, goons my scalp—

*The rest is musk*

*The rest is muster*

Quick it was, such a luck serpent-struck my artery, and boiling  
Before the serving, I crawled  
From my Open Neck, and announced to all the guests—

&

How the moon storied after.  
So that I stood, alchemied.  
My carriage forked, molten.

I, a Sloe-eyed maiden in comely  
Woods: harvesting blakkened roam.

Spoken castle, I am always washing.  
Little as bristle—but thinking, thinking.

Snow heaps on my captured

Shoulders, I have walked the circumference  
Of myself. Plant grasses; wait.

## ANGLO-SAXON (2)

*Clever* is not an Anglo-Saxon word.  
Neither *coward* nor *nurture* nor *enemy*.  
*Weep* was theirs, *sleep* and *wean*—always  
The weaning off sweet milk to wake.  
But they felt as much as they worked:  
*Soul* was theirs, carved and hammered  
From stones. We are left with the stubs  
Of their speech: it molds in our gardens.  
No *solar*, but *sun*: no *space*, only *bog* and *spread*.  
They knew *knew* first and best. Knew  
To spill and spare. They found *play*  
In *plegian*: the *g* ground up with earth,  
Vowels splashed with dark wine. I  
Am a bride to the speak they bedded,  
Rotted, and grew: made new for me in *slough*,  
*Dog*, and *watching*. They gave me the *What*,  
First word of the oldest tale, the *What* I hoard  
And cannot keep, the *What* I carry now to you.

## WHAT DO ASPARAGUS DREAM OF? THEY DREAM OF BLOOD

From this hollow plain I make a thicket, I make  
The wind engrave my eyes. I wear a bearsuit,  
Cunning banquet, a century pummeled by speed,  
Panhelic. Shaman says, Stop looking at that bag  
Of bleating potatoes you call a self, that house  
Swimming from its windows. I wander at night,  
A tiger with no hooves. A nerve of meat chewed  
To death by horses. I tried to destroy myself,  
Whirling, prodding refrigerators and offspring,  
Drinking jars of buttons. Then Toad surfaced  
From the grass to say: I don't know much. Well  
Neither does this arm, which follows me around  
With impudence, with the grace of circus newts.  
Leaping turnips, stationary gods, godlookalikes:  
I need to make something of this puny, hogstruck,  
Unwanted day. Your beauty's apparel shimmies  
Across the floor. You covered up your nakedness  
With poetry and a pear. Venerable mares,  
I am the Several. Plum and gorge. I suppose  
Your hours are haunting and delicate as trees,  
As jewelry. And your rapt attention afraid of itself  
Like women rotating azaleas. This rabbit's ears  
Tell me you have many secrets of your own.  
My pigfeet progress towards the Golden Opening,  
And I spit out the pairings of goose and goose  
As some kind of elegant beetle colonizes my audio.

Asymmetrical Muses in Syrupy Dresses, it is I,  
The Lemon Tree, having raked tawdry lumps  
From my eyelashes for years, hoping you'll notice.  
My Bees, sleepy in Victorian frocks, share sacred  
Rages within teacups. And you, Unintended Bulb  
Of Reason, why do you erect in my Napoleonic roots?  
Eye-sized seeds in a land where no one grows.  
The stud in the mind. For a donkey to lick. Hangs  
Stalled and stony. Better than a pinprick. Keep  
Away from mirrors, says Shaman—O Shaman,  
Only you have loved my buried, crepuscular face.

## GOODNIGHT, SOLILOQUY

Oven off.  
TV stilled.  
Spine blind.  
Roots told.  
Fly drowned.  
Fields molten.

Tired of feeling everything, the lake takes no more prisoners.

May ancient wars travel your brow, may the skulls of jaguars call you  
with their emperors,  
Green nerves, liquid tesseracts, goodness spooling—

May you wake  
Bellied, deserted.  
Years gathered.  
Feet mended.  
Being steeled.  
Guardian howled.

Emerge from the milky eye.  
Held as you are by no one in particular, loose in the hands.

## THE MIRACLE SMACKED ME

Did you just speak to me as if to a horse?  
As in, trying to sow seeds with your hair  
In my knickers? I've embellished my knickers  
With thinking, now they wink knowingly  
At whomsoever passes. The snow in their eyes  
Gleams, too, a snow that waits for the moose  
To arrive. (The moose are larger than your mind.)  
Gertrude Stein cradles me in her arms. "You  
Are the ugliest baby I've ever seen," she coos,  
Sounding just like a rhinoceros clearing its throat  
In the last moment of extinction. *Well.* Those trees  
Are contagious! I live and sway inside them.  
My mind is a golden marsupial, forever  
Nibbling on something in the musty pouch.  
The stars worry, they are sorry. But I am not.  
I am a live nerve, caught by something huge  
And serious, but watch—still I keep on flying.

## NO IFS OR BUTS, ONLY ANDS

I want aggressive steeples and dilated apples.  
Travel me there, golden burro in a blurry hat.  
A narthex of litigious bugs follows me instead.  
Someone cradles my head from far off with long,  
Long arms. I've devoted my life to pisciculture,  
Finally. Piston of me goes bludgeoning. But I like  
Everything! This and that door says, Life Is Hard,  
But my steps through the garden are gigantic!  
Sunflowers are ripe with the seed of ancestral lions!  
My seven uneducated dragons are bitter regarding  
Their fortunes, and can you blame them! My hair  
Is loops of live tigers resuscitating! Each pinprick  
Reveals a new eye in my splendid skin, marvelous  
Pie bringing out the Fungoid. Failure like nervous  
Houses lathers me over. Trees of disappointment—  
Urgent, pharmaceutical, farming the patriarchy  
—Mop up the lather. It's true, this lollipop future,  
Just as my unshackled head galumphs eloquent  
As wine, working for its keep in the haystacks  
(Haystacks, I see you, you spiritual virgins).  
Latinate logic stews in my plum. Lines crisscross  
The world, a child running with bright yarn.  
Thunder is my keeper. I'm in the porchlight  
With the muskrat, who steps into the circle of time  
With no clothes on, no candle to touch the sea.

## SONG OF MY SELF-LOATHING (PART ONE)

I could suck the sweat from my socks and live off the salt for a thousand years.

I could make houses from my snot, and if soldiers were to come and stomp all over my toes they would die before completing their task, such is the hideous number of my appendages.

If all the marbles of my shyness were released into the streets, no one would ever walk upright again.

If everyone else's eyeballs went dim, the sum of that low-wattage couldn't hold a dead lightbulb to the darkness of my vision.

Whole villages have been killed picnicking in the minefields of my atrocities.

I am so self-loathing that I cannot continue, but I will continue out of self-loathing.

Under the law and muck of my confusion I go running.

I place cold hands on my back, and remove them, and call myself home to the tiny dark oven of myself,

Where my self-loathing is king and queen and walks with a nightstick in its hands.

Drunks give fumbled toasts to my foolishness,

And toasters are dumped daily into that river, already thick with dead dogs and lined with raccoons washing their hands.

As I have only located three thoughts in my entire skull, I conclude that instead of brains I have an enormous whale spilling out of my head, slapping at the shore.

Children are afraid of the lopsided way I walk, trying to hold the whale in.

Only the most awkward of birds attend to me, the pelican, the dodo, the heron.

Once my self-loathing was wrapped in newspaper and carried in the arms of an old woman across the street.

But my self-loathing quickly swallowed the newspaper, the old woman, and the street. It is swallowing all of us right now.

There are ballrooms of empty coatracks for every time I did not come to the aid of another.

Forests where books run rampant, raised by wolves because I never opened their pages.

No one escapes the hounds running from the hills of my self-loathing.

My self-loathing is large enough to be a shelter to all, a tent city of refugees.

For I planted my self-loathing in the right season, and it grew immense and gorgeous.

## THE MINISTRY OF CROWS

This is the black field my shame drains to,  
Where a lady burnishes her face, hiding  
In a shawl. Every time a mean thing is said,

The field widens and someone falls in.  
The Ministry of Crows circles over, scavenges.  
I walk the perimeter and win a cake. Clap clap

Black applause and I go bobbing for apples  
In a black river. I lay the paint on thick  
So it can live on my wall forever. My ear

Against the world is. My ear against the world  
Is dull. But brightening. Wincing traveller,  
To wear red shoes in this life is to eat cinnamon

In the next. To die by bear now means a heavy,  
Well-haired heart later. Today is moms and TV,  
Tomorrow is milk and walks along a dragon's back.

Wisdom, you popped out like a prairie dog,  
Then left a husk. Are you mammal  
Or snake? Friends with everyone or no one?

My ear is pressed against foul winds. My eye  
Wanders to the twigs. The Ministry of Crows says:  
Swollen with river will be your thirsty bushels.

## MY EVIL POTATO

Wouldn't it be lovely to make a million dollars and feed  
No one but myself, for hours, in a high lonely castle  
Of brocade and crimson, my head a fishhead drooling,  
Antlers growing out of my legs, my tongue  
Parchment unrolling over the soup?

In the black wood outside, the roaming  
Becomes a girl gathering red currants.

My evil potato sprouts eyes  
And limbs. We go walking arm in arm  
Through the forest and into the desert,

Where a figure brings hungry water to a dry cloak,  
Where the dark hungers after the desert water,  
Where the water is cloaked in dry hunger.

## ORIGIN STORY

I was born into a shopping cart, pushed through a parking lot  
By a manic aunt. I was just a skeleton then, but already waving  
Like a mayor, though only the secret trashcan women were out.  
My aunt's eyes were wild, she had insane wheat brewing  
The field over, she'd spent all her money on overpriced  
Notebooks, her torso was woozy with bad decision Tetris.  
I cowered, my skeleton pelvis rattled against the metal cart.  
Oddly, the trees weren't changing much, no matter how far  
We ran, they all sang the same nursery rhymes and patted  
Me down with their big hands. I had my first rash of beauty  
When the night began slow dancing with a whistle from  
Earlier in the evening, which remembered itself as we passed.  
The whistle laughed in the night's arms. With a pang I knew  
This romance would end, whistle and night would become  
Simple farmers, combing our foreheads over with rakes,  
But the pang eased as I thought of human extinction and  
The slow growth of species over the earth, its face restful  
As a mother turning on the microwave. So gradually, over  
The course of the shopping cart ride, I learned to speak  
In a manner hospitable to plants, in a manner hospitable  
To humans and the cows who raise them from the dead,  
In a manner that wouldn't embarrass my windmill and cause  
Him to cover his eyes with his arms. The convenience store  
Milk jugs were sweating, and the parking lot dog's head  
Was an angry basket of flowers, considering. I could feel  
My aunt getting tired at last, we'd been running forever,  
And by the time my childhood ended, my aunt, she was gone.

How the worms moaned and turned over in their living  
Graves that night! I walked home in electronic rags,  
As if Zeus had ripped up a lightning bolt to make me,  
A loose collection. The flower-dog was now a toilet  
Calm and white; then a refrigerator, murderous with  
Weight, groaning with meaning; then a bunch of forks  
Dumped into the sink at once. The vibe was decidedly  
Domestic but I was still learning the ways of the world,  
So I tied ribbons over my face, fell asleep in my own palm.  
When I woke up, whatever is out there, always ranging,  
Sniffed me over at great length, like I was an angel  
Carved from soap, or a trash woman bearing secrets  
From her nighttime vigil, and that feeling of being sniffed  
Over, head to toe, that's what I've been after ever since.

## POVERTY BUCKET

Have I sold my soul to that devil No-Money?  
Would I be better off with a cow for a job?  
These are the questions, my friends. Shakespeare  
Trades my wintry impulses for his own bulge.  
It all comes from somewhere, especially the legs.  
I'm wearing my tuskalicious bangles today.  
I'm wearing that wooden heart I knocked out  
Of an oak to the lunch party. I have festooned  
Myself with galleries. Once I had plenty of cape,  
But even so the wind from my apocalypse  
Bicycle blew the velvet open, I never felt safe.  
Today, like a carcass in heels, I have found  
My Purpose—to rot in a valley of conservative  
Gnats. I do, after all, have one kid in the pouch  
And fourteen dogs vacillating round my wrist,  
Ceiling fans in an Argentinian melancholy.  
My friends! Why don't you come over anymore?  
You do incomprehensible things in your kitchens  
Without me. I thought we were in this together.  
You tremble, cobwebs in the giant's dewy feet.  
(I am the giant, and the feet.) The bitten apple's  
Welling juice is my blood trying to reach you.  
And that beautiful couple ducking under the trees  
Of your swollen yard? My friends, that's me.

## BOG PEOPLE

I miss how our poems would huddle together  
At the imaginary buffet, not eating, bowing  
Their heads in, wool coats making a village.  
Today I hand out glitter crowns to beggars,  
Tomorrow we're bog-bound, throats cut,  
Noose-tied, snacks for the spring goddess.  
That's all right—spring was always biggest.  
Not the current-you but the forever-ago potato  
I miss. Now you're a friend, but once you were  
The Past, tinseled, storied, nosing with desire,  
Happy shit thawing in the park. Our poems are  
Dog's mercury, bracken, cinquefoil, goosefoot  
Next to we, the faceless Danes. No personality,  
I want to be the fungi crackling between trees,  
The secret death-coin in a Viking's ear. Duck,  
Handsome with blood, enough for everyone.  
Let's meet for breakfast and shout: WE ARE  
THE MEAT. No fear, just springtime, and  
Our bones marking the outlines of the village.

## ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Have you observed how a shadow is simply  
A giant's hair, swooping to and fro through time?  
Sure, you could have a picnic there. There's a hulse  
In the garden, back bare to the weeds and grackles.  
I feel agitated, a cornucopia of stars with a snake  
Inside. The snake's been having recurring dreams  
Where it turns into a black branch and must grow  
Very, very slowly. Like my beard growing long  
And swaddling me, the dumpling, deep within.  
Day after day I expect things to stay the same,  
Have I learned nothing? I reject this land of small  
Buckets never filled. My hummingbird companion  
Lives here somewhere, which is a kind of comfort.  
I must remember that money is not watching me,  
Blind in its shifting burrow and never to be seen.  
But my consciousness is looking, it has bundled  
Itself into a filth pocket. What the drowned, honest  
Rat says, I say, too. The black towel hides my horrible  
Face. It is much irritable, how we are speaking now.  
Last time we went to the well, my soul jumped  
In, I watched. Then I pulled up the pail and drank.  
My neck ajar, I poured my soul back in.

## NIGHTWALK

Whatever else I seem to be doing, I'm actually  
always walking. At night. Without a head on.

Isn't that crazy? Walking headless. And picking up apples.

The apples

are apples, but they're also things. Some are memories  
that won't come close, like deer, as one of us  
would be annihilated.

One is the infinite absence of infinite friendship.

Another is how what if I never wash my dishes well enough  
and the spoons gather greasy residue for years and the kitchen bugs  
know about it and lick the spoons at night, and how  
even if the bugs won't lick them, the spoons  
will stay greasy forever and I'll go on living  
without ever fully appreciating this fact  
and then I die.

Even that is an apple.

The relief of realizing this for the first time was so tremendous

my hands almost fell off

but I didn't let them, because then I would  
be

handless as well as headless, and because

my hands wanted the chance to hold these apples,  
they were greedy

for the size and weight of them.

Antlers, time, little wantings.

I could put the apples in my basket.

Antlers, time, and seaweed.

I could lick the apples, I could eat them.

Soup, thought, bearing.

All the mead I ever wanted.

Blood, and a making on a string.

The wildest most far-flung thing.

Penchant, pension, peering.

I could leave them by a tree.

Sequins, soldiers, sapphire.

I could leave them at the gate.

Lamps, lamps calling black.

I could put them on my shoulder.

Meander, salamander, jokes.

I could cook them in a smolder.

Knowledge, pitchers, speech.

I could place them singing, each to each.

Lilies, mandarins, soot.

I could roll them over and around my foot.

Blame, shapes, magic.

They kept happening, and happened.

Bears, nudes, soap.

I could send them off to float.

Baskets, crusades, desire—

I gathered them sweetly around a fire.

And, Viking-wonderful, I helmeted on.

## CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Geniuses crowd under the lake. Giants exist.  
Giants exist at the mouth of the river. Inside trees  
Are many desires but cutting the trees down  
Won't loose them. Knowing things lie silent in mollusk  
Shells. Mollusks don't know how to party. Bearded  
Animals make no noise in the jungle. Middle-class  
Warriors were carved from Stonehenge. Wigs  
Are animals purring all over your head. Puddles  
Everywhere if drunk from can turn you into pears,  
Ghosts, or priests depending on the puddle.  
Wonders, much like water, usually seek low places.  
Cows have four stomachs and four ways  
Of communicating with the gods. People have  
Four eyes, two of which routinely roll away  
To pleasant meadows so they don't have to see  
Anything. The colorblind don't believe in God.  
Spinal cords were made so demons might have  
Something to hold onto. Slavs clutch their knee-  
Caps more often than other types, rocking back  
And forth. Smugness is a hockey puck waiting  
To be kicked. Dragons once ate people inside  
Of large earthy halos which is why volcanoes  
Are so fussy and handsome. Whenever a fact  
Is feeling frisky, it dunks its head in ice water,  
Then eats a sweet potato. Some people are  
Tragically unsilly because they have things  
To lose. Chupacabras are mortally kind

To one another and certain species of turtle.  
Millionaires are actually turtles with physics  
Hats going on loopy. Some people have red faces  
From too much cooking and moneymaking.  
Even if one is a total failure, at least she will  
Triumph completely in death. Cornfields have  
Long haunted the hair roots of farmers. Jackets  
Are for sex appeal plus feeling lonely in  
While eating eggs. Sometimes squirrels cave  
In and award kings with love eternal. Gold teeth  
Are secret offerings to the gods. Kangaroos  
Have a special gland that gives them imaginary  
Orgasms. I am an imaginary orgasm is one way to put it.

## READER (2)

You're eating yogurt; I'm an insect  
At your feet. You wipe your hands  
And peer. Part of you feels nothing,

A lively part of you wants to crush  
My tiny intricacy. But I've got wings  
And dart—catch me in your net,

And I'll admire your nose through the jar  
In your bedroom. We'll share  
The same nightmare in our sleep,

And if I hear you calling somewhere  
I'll come running—I'll forget all  
The ugly things we said, and we can wear

This plague of hornets like a cape,  
March into town for a ham sandwich,  
And be the shouting in the trees.

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