

The Blank Between Us

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Section One

LINT & STRING

I belong
to a blonde lady,
not the one in blue.
Even if I don't
know her
very well,

I do carry
her thoughts
in my pockets
and wait.

If my mother
were a recipe
she'd be written
in sanskrit
and involve
precise directives.

When I find
myself wanting
I find myself making
excuses for actions
I know the roots of.

When I find
myself waning
I find myself
fingers deep
in my own pockets,
looking for you.

In the list
of ways
I'd like to be
remembered
daughter
is first.

THE TIME HAS COME

Tears for pain or plain pleasure.
I want soup. I forgot to call
you and now it's too late or
too early or too (god forbid)
lovely a moment to ruin with ringing.

What's this? A string
for my fingers, one to tie me
up with, like magic handy-
men might if they could only
figure out how to read minds
or books about fishing knots.

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she had a kind of hex
about her, in the way
she wore things, in
the way she took things
off. She knitted wishes
into linens and named
her days, like errant
children, into myth
or memory –
whichever's which.
This is the story of
212 and how reality's
magicked into being
with the flick of a wrist,
a laugh tossed out, just so,
a fishing line.

THIS LITTLE TRUTH

I try to evict sentiment
from my house, but I love
to love. Jinxing myself,
I once knitted a future out of light
and licorice, ignoring the signs
in my own small handprints.
Now I devote myself
to new tasks, ignore the dead
plants still smarting the window
box. If my fingers
tremble, the leaves don't
mind. I must take solace
in that which is untrue. Blame it
on my upbringing. I hide and seek
and wait and want. Without
a map I make patterns of thread,
every step another spiral
staircase closing in on itself.

DOTTED LINES

I am the beekeeper's assistant.
I write books and read honeycombs.
I walk in zigzag. I stalk shock
and wear wax, worship
this tiny miracle. I carry
my history around, trailing
ribbons or fibs or wingtips
behind me. I wear old wounds
for pleasure and revel
in the sting of them. I sing
songs of penance, know the price
of my little love, know cost
is a line that I'd rather not cross.

ANY MOMENT

Beeswax burns brighter
with time, sings songs
and doesn't stop loving
its own wicked nature.
What does it mean, to want
to hold your hands open
around that breath of air
where something ought to be
but isn't? Idle hands turn
instead to knitting, to the palm
kiss of a well-loved knife,
the one used to chop dates
or apples or a wedge of lemon
to place between my buzzing teeth.

THE CHARM OF BEING A VESSEL

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Suppose this
were a confession, shredded
affinity. An empty teacup
stained personal.

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Tepid worry, incapable
of depth, lingers.
It has something to do
with the retina.

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Ultramarine is wicked
ancient, and precious.
Each moment makes
its own small logic.

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Gather tribute. A bouquet
is homage. Amass stones,
glass, rubble. Love them.

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Writing becomes
the effect of avoiding
a lover, displacing
the vessel.

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Four days of drizzling,
verdant tarps, stacks
of fruit. Empty-eyed, I pretend
what I can't abide.

APPROACHING INFINITY

Sundays are mute funerals.
We go to the cemetery, find our paper hearts.
The grass blooms neon to spite the gray of mourning.

In the shank of the day, I can feel
the scent of dirt invade my bones, each one
a reminder that simplicity is a cure I cannot acquire.

Close your eyes already, let yourself
fall into ceramic moon graves.
You'll never find me in the porch light.

LITTLE TREASURES

All of my children are blond. Gone. Grown.
Not up. Just over, or out.

I thought I could keep them,
each one a little treasure in my pocket.

My sister never knew this weight, but now
She knows my children better than I do.

She and my daughter wear the same
unkempt bangs and speak the same

foreign words, lily syllables
slipping from their tongues.

I speak, but they all ignore me.
Making little sense of my words,

They say *unwell* and shake their golden heads.
I sleep in the streets and dream of a time

when I held the world in my belly.
What is this ache?

Now my son has a daughter, and she looks
just like mine. Blond and frowning.

MORE THAN I OUGHT

My body is taut
about you,
but you're more
than I want
to carry around.
The weight might
just pop me.

You like me better
without eyeliner.

I always ask
for too much and what
I get is as vivid as nuclear
fruit on your table.

I don't hide. You won't
seek. The small talk
will be awkward.

Someone will say
She told me so.
I'll flinch or forget
about it, but I fall
more than I ought
and the bruises
won't heal for weeks.

IN PLACE OF SLEEP

I curl into the crook
of my own arms.

I want a slip of sunlight,
a stranger's bed, a shadow
to sleep inside of.

I miss sleep and stare
at the shapeless, the blank
left open without you,
the limitless space.

Section Two

IMPRINT

I want to press
your body

parts between
the pages of books

I've never read
so that one day

when I am a grandmother
of three and have been

married for 28 years,
I can open the book

on the coffee table
and say *oh, yes,*

I remember,
like you are

a flower
I once picked.

I want to press
my image into you

so you can feel
the weight of me

the weight of that day
in your grandmother's attic

when we lay on newspapers
older than we were

and tried without success
to blow smoke rings

while your mother
(two floors below us)

made her holiday
green bean casserole.

I want to press
your memory

into something smaller
than the ache I still carry.

IN THE QUICK

Spinning is meaning-
less euphoria. If x
is a dancing addiction
and y is my love
of whiskey, then bliss
can be found in a bar
or a barnyard. In the beat
of a two-step, I can suspend
my own dreams and fall
in heat with a bandit
or three.

AT THE COUNTRY BAR

Howl hates this and wants to know
when we can leave. The spinning
doesn't work the same on everyone,
I guess. Howl wants to stretch his
muscles and test my patience. Because
there is no convincing or cajoling him
I resort to conniving, promising smart
books, talk radio, all those other things
Howl wants, knowing that even in my best
mood I can't ignore what I rile.

RITE

your hands search
for a resting place,

the hitch of my belt or
the swell of my hip.

even when I dance
with other men, your eyes

find mine and crinkle
green in ways I like.

I've learned to follow
or at least hold on.

you wait for my little kick
how you do a little kick, too

just to show me
you like me and pay me

attention. how many mistakings –
or kinds of remaking – can we

make this into? I don't keep
promises, but I do collect

the pennies, pearls, and turquoise
buttonhooks you leave on my step.

BUS MONOLOGUE

Dear sir or madam or mad-
men, forgive me: it's the tuaca
talking. I started drinking hot
toddlies and I forgot to send in my work
or anything else for that matter. What?
No, I don't and no, I don't intend to. It's not my way
to feel shame. I gave all that up the day I got felt up
in the church overflow room by a man whose name
could be rearranged to spell demonic. No, I'm not
kidding or even crying about it anymore. Just a raspy
laugh that burns like running for the bus
after one too many whiskey shots. You've got to be
kidding me, dude, you're sixteen. You're twelve. You're my little
sister's boyfriend, and I do have some standards, thank you.

ALL THE WAY DOWN

I mar my beauty, mess
it up a bit with sand
paper so that I can paint
it teal, edge it in pink or prayer
magnets. There's too much
sex in this face – it makes people
nervous, eyes shifting to finger-
nails, bitten or brittle
by the look of it. I am learning
again. I have a new love
and a new notebook
to put it in. Isn't that
what you asked for? Less
sex on my face and more
in your hands, mouth full
of me or mockery or maybe
my name, which I would prefer
you did not say here, and by that
I mean now, in bed, but which
I would prefer you'd say after,
once we've fully consumed
one another all the way
down to the bones.

STRIPPED

I'm a performance, not an artist,
just the show. Bright lights
and glittery accessories.
What, if it pays the rent, it pleases
me. It's as simple as this: I want
to be a stripper, but the only way
I can justify it is to call it poetic
expose. What's so wrong
with flesh, with the state
we're born in? This is the price
of fresh fruit, of love, of cucumbers
grown in my mother's garden. I am
building a ticky taffy time bomb
with your name on it, Mom.
I am planning to make you pay
through your teeth, but you don't
even have any in that mouth
of yours, it's too busy building
truth in repetition – every time
you tell me a story, it becomes more
real to you doesn't it? Yes, I know.
I know because I, too, build
tiny realities made of moss,
the dirt collecting under my fingernails
a generous price to pay for what
can be found in my own made-up
spaces. And so it comes down
to this: what shapes have you carved
into this little heart of mine
that make it impossible to find you
and yet also impossible to leave
you? Sure, you gave me gifts, good ones,
too, but was it worth it, when still I want
to take my clothes off for money
because that is the only place where I can feel
safe, lost in my own twirling flesh?

BUT DAMNIT

my tits sit like apples
against my arms and the water
in your shower reds me up
a bit. I want to (but don't) cry.
I am a girl, after all, and I am soaked.
you taught me how to shake
a drink right, showed me what to do
with my hands when I wanted
something fancy, built me
a playground made of promises,
but now I can't stop staring
at my reflection in your showerhead,
and damnit, I am all running mascara,
shower spray mixed in with saline
and damnit all, I *do* feel sad or short-
changed (or disappointed) because
you aren't a lovely unknown,
a stranger I can fuck and leave
this moment with. no, I am stuck
here hating this moment even as I try
to salvage it or my dignity (or both),
but god, why can't this be math?
why can't desire just be
an equation, one even you can solve?

DEAR JOHN

I get my heart
tangled
in other people's
fists. These are not
dreams I made
up. I fall
infatuated
several times
a day and just as
often I fall flat
out of it, dropped
back into my own
world, like a coin
in a slot.

This machine
won't make
sense to you
or even to me.

It is lovely
and elusive
to be loved
this way
once, but more
than that is too
much for many
or most. And now
you have it,
John dear. Now
you know.

THE ART OF WANTING

From the first slow dance,
he knew she'd go
with him. If a woman touches
her hair, that's an indicator

of interest, and besides
no one buries her face
in a stranger's neck
unless she wants to fuck.

When he spoke of seduction,
he spoke in rules:
number one: be excellent.
number two: disappear.

He said he'd take her
to the beach where
they could practice
aerials in the sand.

He said she'd be back.
He said a lot of things. She
listened and laughed, smiled
at his little lack, and left.

LIKE CRICKETS

when ringing around the rosary,
don't forget your candlesticks – you'll need some
light, love. let's count: how many times can we hail
the blonde lady dressed in blue, how many beads
can we eat before the weight of them makes us sick?
let's pray: dear god, can we get some answers
for the questions etched into the patterns
of our palms? we want omelettes and fresh apples and silk-
shined happenstance. we want a womb for the desires you made
us with, the ones we carry in our pockets like long-loved coins.
don't forget: we will wait like crickets bouncing in a jar.
we will chirp and chirp, always looking
and finding signs in our own echoes.

THE BLANK BETWEEN US

I am not the people. I am the hills
behind those people. I am every single tiny house
back there. I am the water. I am that fence.
I am the twinkle of light on leaves. I am the odd flora
populating the ground at the people's feet. I am slatted
boards. I am smiles and hats and the tops of sun-kissed heads.
I am dark trousers. I am skirts pleated with the weight
of daylight. I am awkward undergarments. I am wind-kept
bangs. I am hands, curling in on themselves, keeping company in fingertips.
I am white cap sleeves and the memory of your mother that time
she kissed my forehead. Her eyes – ink sparks – weren't meant for me
and neither were you, which is why *you* are not pictured here. No, you are not
even the coins and crumbs crushed into forgotten pockets. You are not grass
stained monochrome. You are not the oddly blooming flower at my mother's feet.
You are not slacks or wind or angled rooftops. You are, if anything, the dark
spot. The one in the corner. The not *here* exactly. The negative
space where sugar-laced memory melts off into other continents.

Section Three

CURRENCY

First wrangle a job
at the local farmer's market.
Work hard. Raise an eyebrow
when you smile. Sell the fuck
out of your wares. Embarrass
yourself and others, but don't
blush at such tactics. Wink
at children. Call the priest
babe. Laugh loud and often.
Offer free samples in song-
bird style. Press glassed gold
into stranger's hands, and marvel
at the spark of fingertips grazing.
Fill your own tip jar with good
intentions, best wishes, moments
more memorable than clean
linens, besides, honey makes
everything sticky, sweet bending
back to taste its own path.

UNDOING

Once upon a Sunday, I stole your concrete heart. A heavy mass in my small hands – gritty to the touch. With a measure of meaning, purloined parts connote love, but that is irrelevant to this situation.

Wanting only a coffee crush, I walked into a relationship with a sober alcoholic or a Republican or an operatic bartender – there is little difference really. I fall, again and again, into the arms of saccharine and saline. Whose antiquated theory of courtship grips me now? My eager fingers will worry the matter until each tiny pebble, once embedded, breaks free.

PIECE BY PIECE

Addiction is a process
of substitution.

What I want is not
what I have, but
what is here could
work just fine
as long as I can't have it.

That which I fear
is that which I seek
and the rolling around
in circular logic makes
me dizzy. Losing
myself in my search for
myself makes perfect
sense. Let's just hope
that half of me doesn't
leave in the night.

BACK AND FORTH AND BACK AGAIN

Across a city from me, you
feel my weight. Across a table
from you, I'm nowhere
to be found. When I said
that I wouldn't leave you
all alone, what I meant was
I'd leave you here.

After watching for a while, he swooped in.
You never saw it coming, never
even thought loss a possibility.
Well, that's your mistake, sir. Now
you want to work hard. Now you want
to make it up to me.

When all is over and you turn
away, think of the time
we first met. Think of the days
when I wrapped myself around you
like anemone, like a ray of fucking
sunshine folding over and over and over
into itself. Think of how my love
for you was like a plant, one
you could never remember
to water.

There's a slip of rain inside each cloud.
There's a wish inside every glinting
bone in my body. There's a secret want,
a spell I can put myself under and only one
way to break it. There's a space
in my ribcage that I'm saving
for someone else.

MATH PUZZLE #47

I want to be more
than friends, but less
than anything more
titled. I want to be proper
fucked – by you and anyone

else I choose.
I want to drink
away the taste
of my childhood.

Hesitation, that half-
breath when you consider
consequences.

I love the idea of the bad
idea, and by the time
I remember the reality
bit, I am crying in the shower.

Who spray-painted hearts
on that fence? Switchblade
romance makes my head
hurt, but at least the dandelions
are bursting into being –

weird yellow beams
roaring in all directions.
Is this the afterlife?
I'd like a second
opinion; Infinity is a concept,
not a number, after all.

FIT THE CURVE

I water my coffee
down and thin
my buzz to a trickle.
How long can I,
can we, make this last?
How long will I find joy
in the finite volume
of you even spiked
as this is with my best
intentions? All I can do is take
solace in what will fit
the curve of my palm.
I want to insulate what
warmth I have –
I know it won't last.

CHURCH

I force my fingers,
those naughty children,

into a prayer-shape.
They find enlightenment

in numbers, and I am
again embarrassed

by my insatiable need
to talk. One day,

the universe might try
a new tactic, and I might

consider acquiescing,
but for now I just

fold my hands and pray
for the art of stillness.