



THE BODY ARCHIVE

THE BODY ARCHIVE

ISSUE XII

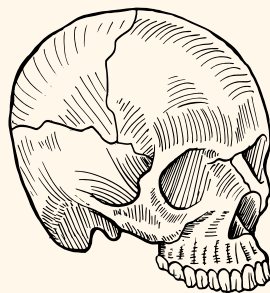
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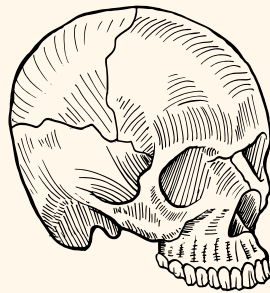
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“WHERE THERE IS NO IMAGINATION, THERE IS NO HORROR.”

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

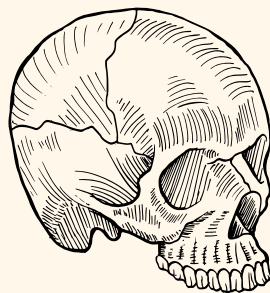


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INTRODUCTION

The Body Archive

The Body Archive is a gathering of what we carry in silence — the pulse of memory, the ache of becoming, the stories written beneath the skin. Here, the body remembers what the mouth forgets. In every poem, story, or art, every fragmented breath becomes testimony. These works speak to how we inhabit our flesh, how loss reshapes us, how tenderness finds a home even in the breaking. Together, they form an archive of what it means to live inside a body that is always both wound and wonder.

Madisen D'Ascenzo

Editor-in-Chief

Author BIOGRAPHIES

AGONY BUT NOT QUITE ECSTASY, 15

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up in Appalachia. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is a Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and other journals. Edward is also a published poet.

CRASH COURSE IN CARPAL TUNNEL, 16

nat raum is a queer disabled artist, writer, and editor based on unceded Piscataway and Susquehannock land in Baltimore. Past and upcoming publishers of their writing include *Split Lip Magazine*, *Baltimore Beat*, *Poet Lore*, *beestung*, and others. Find them online at natraum.com.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, 17

John Sara is a writer from Parma, Ohio. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Ashland University, where he works as an adjunct professor and lead fiction editor for the student-run literary journal *The Black Fork Review*. You can follow him on Instagram @darkbat616.

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Deanna Benjamin writes lyric memoir, poems, and micro-stories. Her creative work is forthcoming in *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *The Texas Review*, *Flash Boulevard*, and other venues.

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Ellen Perleberg is a librarian and care worker in Spokane, Washington. She has cerebral palsy.

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Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including two Pushcart Prize nominations. Her poetry chapbook, "Fairytale," was published by *Bottlecap Press*. Her debut novel "Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams" was published by *Type Eighteen Books*.

THE BLOOD CHILD, 25

The author is a library worker, writer, and Floridian in upstate New York. Her work has appeared from *Malarkey*, *Weirdpunk*, *Islandia Journal*, *Ancillary Review of Books*, and more. She edits literary coverage for horror website *DIS/MEMBER*. Find her on Bluesky @deeholloway or at deeholloway.carrd.co

HAIRCUT, 27

Ian Brownlie is a writer and poet from the UK. He has recently been published in *SHINE Quarterly* and *Cosmic Daffodil*. He has children's poetry in *The Dirigible Balloon*, *The Toy Tyger Tyger* and *Little Thoughts Press*. He can be found on Bluesky: @ianbrownlie.bsky.social (He/him)

A WHITE LIE NEVER HURT ANYBODY, 28

Sophie Marlowe (she/they) is a queer Yorkshire-based writer with a preference for poetry and scriptwriting. At the moment, they mostly dabble in an amalgamation of the uncanny, the weird and the eerie as well as body horror. Creating poetry and scripts that explore humanity's complex and destructive relationship with nature.

OUT OF DRAG, 29

Hannah Weisz (any pronouns) is a writer, performer and producer based in New York City. They mainly write poetry, essays and songs. Their work appears in *Anthropozine*, *New Note Poetry*, *LEVITATE* and other publications. Outside of writing, Hannah works in theater, drag, and recorded music.
IG @hannahmweisz @cameronesthermusic

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Katie Kenney received her MFA in Creative Writing from Western Washington University. Her poems have appeared in *Red Ogre Review*, *RHINO*, and *Grub Street Literary Magazine* among others.

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Joshua C. Pipkins is a pushcart nominated poet based in Memphis, Tennessee. Their work has previously appeared in *The Poet Heroic*, *The Belfast Review*, and *Trampoline Poetry*.

BAD PAIN DAY, 32

Sarah Klein is a disabled queer author whose first chapbook, "Mast Cell Mathematics: A Chronic Illness Calculus," was released through *Querencia Press* in June 2025. They were also nominated for 2025 Best of the Net. Free Palestine.

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Brooksie C. Fontaine is an author, illustrator, and MFA recipient. Her work has appeared in over thirty literary journals and anthologies, including *trampset*, *Bending Genres*, *Literally Stories*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Fabmidan Journal*, and *Ghost Parachute*.

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Emily is a writer from Belfast, Northern Ireland who has recently finished her studies in creative writing. She writes short stories, non fiction and stage plays. Her work often explores dark subjects and themes as well as issues that she is passionate about.

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Judy Slitt is based in Charlottesville, Virginia. This would be her first published piece.

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Jim Newcombe was born in Derby in 1976 and moved to London in 2006, where he has lived ever since. He has committed much of the poetry of his native tradition to memory and his poetry has been published widely.

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Kit Kron (it/she) is a writer and student from Helena, Montana who currently attends Oregon State University.

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Jonathan B. Aibel, a recovering software engineer, lives in Concord, MA, traditional homelands of the Nipmuc. His poems have been published in *Barrelhouse*, *Chautauqua*, *Pangyrus*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Cider Press Review*, and elsewhere. Jonathan's chapbook "Echoes of Uruk" was a semi-finalist for the Tupelo Press 2024 Snowbound Prize. <http://www.jbaibelpoet.com>.

IN THE HYDRO CORRIDOR, 48

Silas Foxton is a genderqueer artist, writer and community worker meandering around the great lakes basin. Their work picks at a simultaneously strained and reverent relationship to land, ancestry, faith and identity which draws on experiences of dream life and things only seen out of the corner of one's eye.

SLEEP, 50

Mr. Melton is a poet whose work has appeared in *Amethyst*, *Agape Review*, *Big City Lit*, *Compass Rose*, *Confrontation*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, *The Galway Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Lyric*, *The Miscellany*, *Monterrey Poetry Review*, and others. He lives in Bluffton, SC (USA).

PICK & PLUCK, 51

V. Bray has a box filled with her first "books" written as a child, usually illustrated with markers and bound with yarn. Her work has been published in *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Multiplicity Magazine* and *The Writer* magazine. authorvbray.com

MORE TESTS, 52

Chris Bullard lives in Philadelphia, PA. In 2022, Main Street Rag published his poetry chapbook, *Florida Man*, and Moonstone Press published his poetry chapbook, *The Rainclouds of y*. Finishing Line Press published his chapbook, *Lungs*, in April and his work appeared in *Keystone: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*, this May.

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Kate MacAlister is a Social Justice Witch, poet, and filmmaker weaving ritual with resistance. An intersectional feminist who prefers megaphones to open mics, she conjures the body as spellbook and battleground. Kate is the author of two intersectional feminist poetry collections and award-winning poetry films blurring magic with reality.

I'LL STARE OFF INTO SPACE UNTIL YOU DIE, 55

Adam Jon Miller's poetry was included in the *The Louisville Review*, *Talobusha Review*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *The William & Mary Review*, *OxMag*, and elsewhere. Visit him at www.adamjonmiller.com.

IRRITATION, 56

Terri Deno is a freelance writer living in the Midwest. When she's not writing, you can find her reading massive quantities of books and rocking out to her vinyl collection. She is the author of "If It Was New York," "Summer 2009," "Tragic Darlings," and "Love Spells."

[GRIEFBODY], 57

a.d. is drawn to the sacred, the profane, the mysterious and the mythological, which provides inspiration for her work. She is a bisexual poet and visual artist, and her work is published in *HAD*, *Aôthen*, *Hominum Journal*, *the engine(idling)*, *Welter*, *Bleating Thing*, and elsewhere. Tumblr & Twitter: @godstained

SECOND OPINION, 58

D.L. Stille writes speculative, thriller, and horror fiction. She has been previously published in the Flame Tree Fiction Newsletter, *Maudlin House*, and *4LPH4NUM7R1C*. You can find her on social media @DorothyStille or on her website: dlstille.com.

WHERE I HAVE PAIN AND IT IS WITHOUT ORIGIN, 61

Bria Rivet is an LMSW who works in out-patient mental health care. Originally, her educational background began in literature at Saginaw Valley State University where she specialized in poetry and feminist poetics. She has had poems published in *Cardinal Sins*, *The Common Ground Review*, and *805 Lit + Art Magazine*.

AFTER THE BUTCHERING, 62

Erin Matheson Ritchie lives in California with her spouse and pet rabbit. She earned her master's degree in education at Stanford University and taught secondary English for seven years. Her poems appear in *New Feathers Anthology*, *Naugatuck River Review* and *Oracle: A Fine Arts Review*.

VILE BODIES, 63

Sameen Shakya was born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal. He moved to the USA in 2015 to pursue writing, earning a Degree in Creative Writing. He returned to Kathmandu in 2022 and is currently based there.

SCARLET DUSTED PALMS, 64

Marah Jo Heikkila loves to write, explore new cities, and savor coffee flights. They have been published in the *Garfield Lake Review*, *Toe Good*, and *Havik, Qua Literary Magazine*, and *Dipity Literary Magazine*. They really enjoy reading in their free time and spending time with their nephew.

PATCHOULI, 66

Hillary Gonzalez, a queer, disabled AuDHD poet from Baltimore, is the author of *Seasons and Wild Unfelt World* (Gnashing Teeth Publishing, 2026). Their work appears in *South Broadway Press*, *Bi+ Book Gang*, *Yellow Arrow Publishing*, *Loblolly Press' Understory*, and *In Praise of Despair* by *Beyond the Veil Press*.

SHATTERED SOUL TWO, 68

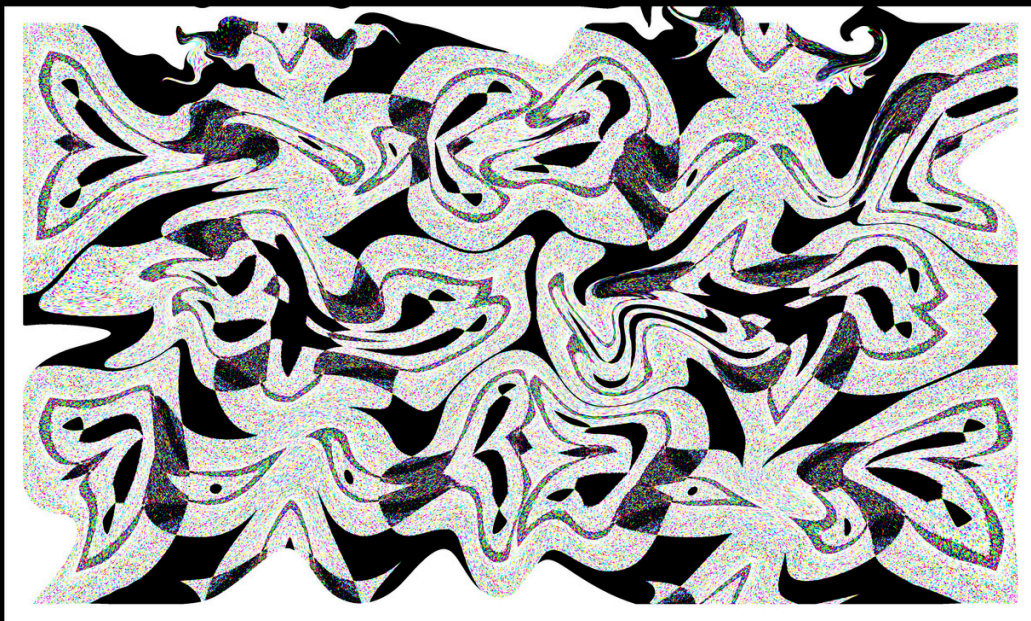
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TO MY DAUGHTERS, 69

Diana Raab PhD is a memoirist, poet, workshop leader, and award-winning author of fourteen books. Her latest book is "Hummingbird: Messages from My Ancestors" (*Modern History Press*, 2024). Raab writes for *Psychology Today*, *The Good Men Project*, *Thrive Global*, and many others. Visit dianaraab.com.



Agony But Not Quite Ecstasy



crash course in carpal tunnel

sip sourly—the juices you seek
serve only to wound. to sustain
yourself, push, but not too hard.

i mean the way your wristbones
no longer wish to snap, instead
to be ripped out and thrown away.

wear gloves and insist it's also
arthritis when every capillary
is inflamed, bad-tempered.

your elbows probably hurt too,
don't they? a swath of dull
electricity surges the forearm.

you've seen the mouse meme—
natural, unnatural. brace yourself
toward an attempt at normalcy.

the goal is to survive, but if you
catch yourself thriving, you may
be fluttering too close to the sun.

A Nightmare on Elm Street

You tell me the scratches on my arms
look like claw marks; the result of some
rabid animal, not a symptom of insomnia;
fingernails pressed deep into skin.

When I cut myself in a bad dream,
you insist that a monster must have done it,
search the closet and under the bed.

*We'll get him, you promise,
burn the house down
to make sure he's gone.*

Rescue Mission

Yesterday, a friend said to me, *a rescue mission*. I was drinking coffee and eating dark chocolate on the back porch. The grape hyacinths were emerging. Robins were gathering up twigs and mud. And my friend said, *you're writing a rescue mission*. I was silent, trying to comprehend the dimension of *rescue* and its relationship to the water, invisible scars, on my shoulders. I had forgotten about them as if they had been temporary remnants of an unremarkable accident. But when I came to wonder about the how of who I am, I remembered the feeling of water dripping on my shoulders but had no story to go with it, so I asked my parents about the big events of my childhood.

I asked about Happy Dog, and my mother told me how we coaxed him from a ditch and into the backseat of the '56 Chevy Bel-Air with Doritos, how she and I took him to a vet, where I named him Happy, how the vet cured his mange. I asked about why we moved out of the apartment where I learned to make oatmeal on the stove, and Daddy told me about the broken air conditioner and the leaky bathroom from the upstairs apartment and how the landlord evicted us and the judge sided with him. I asked about the house we moved to after that happened, and my parents told me about the miracle of finding it and the un-mown, knee-high grass and the roaches, all of the roaches. I'd say thousands but surely there were less than that. They scurried up a closet wall when we opened the door, let the sunlight shine into it. We bombed the house with cans and cans of pesticide foggers before we moved in. And they told me about the day Daddy went to jail: how Mother drove home from the grocery store to find me cartwheeling in the yard, the magnolia tree towering above me. I took notes when they talked, filled in the empty spaces in my memory, began to build a narrative that

Rescue Mission

would help me to know the shape of that unremarkable moment, to know whether the drops of water cut a single scar or a thousand, rough and smooth, wrinkled and stretched, there and not there. Like the memory itself, the invisible scar, or scars, a salve.

You're rescuing the child, my friend said, as if it were obvious, as if the child had always been the one who haunted me with this sensation of water crashing into my shoulders. She went on. *You need to give the child a point of view*. She spoke with such ignition, such urgency, such certainty, as if she truly believed that children have points of view, that they not only perceive but interpret. It seems so obvious. Of course, they have points of view. Of course, they interpret. But in that moment my friend's words filled a chasm. They formed the bridge I needed to ask: did this little girl in the lamplight, wet from a bath cut short, do more than perceive that day? Did she have a point of view? Did she interpret? *However trained or accepting she is of her own irrelevance*, my friend said, *she is significant. She's in a poem. You put a child in a poem*. As if she were simply there / as if all her parents needed / to do was feed and clothe / her and give her a safe place / to sleep, to dream, as if / memory could be a salve / to her scar.

Strut

Matty told the press that he modeled his own work as a way to challenge gender and beauty norms. Saturday nights at the Stiletto, he told pretty boys that he modeled his own work because he didn't trust anyone else to do it right. "Except you, maybe." He told his mother that he modeled his own work because models were expensive, and he was still, after all, only a moderately successful designer.

"Moderately successful" was a degree from Parsons that he might never pay off. Not one big break but several medium ones. A dress on RuPaul's Drag Race. A shoe line at Nordstrom, who will sell you a pair in different sizes if you ask. No spread in Vogue yet, but plenty of Hometown Heroes pieces, whether home was North Carolina or New York City.

Matty was optimistic when the Village Voice contacted him. Alternative enough for his brand, established enough to sell it. Then like all the others, they showed up at his Thursday visit to the Children's Hospital, where he designed decorative covers for children's prosthetics. A Spiderman leg for one, sparkles for the next, a Minecraft-themed arm the week after. Most importantly, of course, each little graduate had a fashion show down the runway of the Rehab Raccoon ward.

He didn't have to volunteer at Children's. Everyone in fashion needed a cause, but there were other causes. He could have put his time into sustainability, gay rights, men's mental health, world peace. But journalists and fans would still ask about his legs, and he would still answer. Yesiwasbornwithoutthem Noitdoesn'thurt Yestheycangetwet. Besides, he liked the kids, who were still learning to answer the questions, who still wanted

Strut

to show off. Growing up they had called him Forrest Gump and meant another F-word. "Run Forrest, walk Forrest, let me see you run f*****."

Matty answered the questions and let them take a picture of his legs. This reporter at least had the tact to ask before photographing the children. When they remembered the article was about his upcoming show at New York Fashion Week, the reporter asked what had inspired him.

"The Mediterranean," he answered. "Its million shades of blue." Which was not untrue, but he was not about to explain in the Children's Hospital that he meant the Berlin sex club Mediterranean.

"Can they go in the water?" the reporter asked. "Your...you know, your legs?"

Showtime. A decent crowd in an unremarkable venue. Rumor had it there was a team there from Harper's. Matty was third in the lineup of a half dozen other moderately successfuls, running around backstage doing unnecessary finishing touches and wrangling coked-up models.

"Next up...Morgana by Matty Dawson presents 'Mediterranean Underground.' Morgana brings a gender-bent futuristic streetwear vision, represented by Matty's own modeling. Matty is the first double amputee to walk at New York Fashion Week."

Strut

Matty cursed himself for leaving the announcer's notes up to the organizer. He'd worked with Alyx before; he thought she would know better. He wasn't even an amputee, for god's sake. When he heard the crowd "ooh," he grabbed a walkie-talkie and told the crew to vamp the music.

Time to give the people what they want. He sat down in a folding chair behind the curtain. One at a time, he removed his legs. He dressed the left leg in a thigh-high platform boot with electric blue laces and sent it down the runway.

The left leg was a natural talent. It strutted at just the right tempo and knew just when and where to stop and pose for the cameras. A straight woman in the audience said it was serving cunt, which wasn't quite true but came close. A photographer asked his neighbor if he knew who its agent was.

If he had seen it, Matty would have said "girl, you can walk." He missed his left leg's debut however, deciding at the last minute to raise the hem on the beaded skirt he dressed his right leg in. People want to see a little leg.

The right leg wasn't quite as gifted as its partner but it did its job. The cascading beads rattled gently and gave the waterfall effect that Matty had hoped for, that he had remade three times to get perfect. A camera flash bounced from the beads to the titanium hamstring.

Alicia went next, in blue latex and leather, and walked the runway like the professional she was, but the crowd was still chattering about the left leg. Mikayla winked at Matty before she stepped

Strut

onto the catwalk. Mikayla was a plus-sized model - which was to say, she was a plus-size model, never just a model. She, too, knew how to give the people what they want.

He swapped Ro and Lucas in the lineup in order to hold the left leg back for the finale. He had spent days and days working on that skirt, a high-low cut of sixty layers of chiffon, each a different shade of blue, with small pieces of mirror sewn in to turn sixty layers into six thousand. He fluffed the skirt one last time. "Make us proud," he said. "Make me proud."

The leg walked out to thunderous applause. When it took its final bow, no one remembered to call Matty out for his. They'd seen enough of him already.

Sweat & Glass

blistered toes
from hours
spent
producing

for other bodies
to occupy homes
constructed from
sweat & glass

shatters- sepia
photographs
their names
cannot be
erased

stains of time
over mother's
chapped lips

tell the stories
of those who
came before

The Blood Child

The average menstruating body produces about 6 gallons of blood in one lifetime. Most people dump theirs down the toilet or toss soaked tampons, but I've been keeping mine in a collection of vats since age 11: rather early onset, quite my luck. Stored properly, blood can be kept outside the body for about 6 weeks before going rancid—but I haven't been storing mine properly. I've intended it to rot and calcify, clot and mold; I occasionally add dashes of other blood, shin-nicked by dull pink razors, to remind my blood-vats whose life they belong to.

Still, to keep my blood-vats' scent contained, they perch in a basement chest freezer, alongside venison shanks and family-size shredded potatoes. 8 or so days every month for the last 41 years, I unseal a lid and empty my Divacup. My unusually heavy periods are a blessing in this way, if no other: the blood's consistency is thick, often studded with shed uterine lining, the days I bleed longer than typical. But in recent months, it's become clear that my menstrual lifetime is coming to its close. I have no regret regarding my womb's emptiness. I've never wanted children. My real offspring lives inside the blood-vats, taking form over long years, its nascent parts shaped by the sublime disgust with which I submit to my body. This child is born of broken expectations and squandered potential. When people see me, they see blood.

The trick is knowing which day is the last. There's no one watching for it but me. Soon enough, there'll be no one looking for me, either, no one looking at me, people will look *through* me.

Better yet, I'll have disappeared entirely.

The Blood Child

In August's deep heat, it seems the blood has stemmed forever. I give it a month to be sure. Another, and nothing but faint spotting, record-breaking summer temperatures seeping into autumn, cloaking my body in an endless embrace. I call it good. On All Souls Day, I haul the blood-vats from their ice cave and into the bathroom, their birthplace after a long thaw, their delivery room. Unsealing lids one by one, I pour—

But *pour* is no longer the correct word. The blood-vats' child, my child, isn't overly tall. About 6 gallons of fluid forms a middle-schooler's frame crouched in the bathtub. But when I drag a comb over its glistening fontanel, a texture resembling hair springs up in the comb's wake, finger-curled bloody black. When I put out my hand, a damp palm presses mine. When I offer it my bathrobe, elbows and breasts and clavicle fill the fabric. When I turn the child toward the mirror suddenly, now, our heights are twinned.

We look into the mirror, my blood-child and me, and smile at each other. Its smile lingers longer than mine, pristine, ready for the world. Soon enough, not even my smile remains.

haircut

cutting my own hair
became the only viable solution
because it minimised
social interaction
discomfort
unknowability
lost control

but now i kneel
naked
watching clumps of hair fall around me
and i see the greying flecks among the brown
grey growing
gaining ascendancy

in the barber's chair i would not notice
the grey
as it slipped to the sticky floor
to be swept away by someone
who wasn't me

i have no difficulty getting up
from the hard floor
but in that recognition itself
i feel the future coming for me

cost
that was another factor
in cutting my own hair
you have to consider the cost

a white lie never hurt anybody

(Trigger Warnings: depression, self-harm, self-harm scars, mental health, body image issues)

you saw lines across my body
commenting with love teasing your lips
that we have matching stretch marks

you traced the silver on my thighs
movement adoring as i watched the questions
brewing behind your brow
my answer too hesitant and stilted to be true
yet
you didn't push and the subject fell dormant

"are they stretch marks?"

"yeah"

i can't bring myself to admit to past failings
humiliation of the skin that never fades
even when they transform from raw rage to
sewn silver threading.

out of drag

my girlhood is a white lie
the world and i tell
each other that neither
of us believes. when we tell it
we cross our fingers and wink
at the camera.
when we hear it
we roll our eyes, smirking.
but when i look in
the mirror or the eyes
of who sees
me i realize
the irony of this body
and name is lost to them
absolutely. no deceit behind
the falsehood.
the way to show the lie
is to show the truth.
the way to show the truth
is to risk the lie's whiteness,
the wink and smirk.
what now?
is the truth worth a knowing
smile?

Upon Reflection

I am not made of my body
but rather the flesh that is stretched
across unadorned bones as I was never
taught to love this form
forever growing and taut
to be spilled over and picked apart
and still, as I am older now
it does less as I hate it more
as girls are made of silhouettes,
all soft shoulders, tactile to touch
and so I've caught the convex eye
of each passing mirror convinced
in silvering, each lie is layered
in small distorted truths.

The Morning Visitor

After "The Morning Visitor" by Dino Buzzati

& when i opened my eyes i knew i wasn't human

i was everything else a man wants to be
when it wants to die

a doll, a dog
a cat, a bird,
a guest in another man's house

& here / was dark and tall
& without expression at all

i was as empty as the room i was found
my body orange as apricot,
my name / its tongue /

/ said my ribs
is not my own my face
is not my own my chest
is not my own my breath
is not my breath.

bad pain day

Being sick drawing into focus
All the parts of my body
That I ignored from dislike
Or did not probe further

Pain pins me alive to bed
a mounted insect still alive
the vicissitudes of living
Hit me: darts into a board

Shipwrecked survivor scrawling
Something short for passerby
Help save me from this
That eats me from the inside

I am a poor pilot of this meat suit
Engines sputtering chassis on fire
A lemon I cannot exchange

The Creation

Justine always tells me what kind of stitch she's using.

"A ladder stitch makes the seams pretty much invisible, at least from a distance," she explains. "But there are prettier ways to do it. I like to make it look sort of decorative, you know? Because you can see the lines anyway, so you might as well make them pretty."

I was born used to the needle, if you could describe my assembly as being "born" at all. It predates my conscious memories, the give of the flesh beneath the sharp point, the pinch-pull pain as the sleek cool metal is pulled through. Then the flossy tug of thread.

She uses pretty colors. Her sewing kit reminds me of a treasure chest – it even looks a little like one, made of polished old wood that smells chestnuty whenever she opens it. She's always smiling and talking, her eyes dancing over the spools inside, glittering with their jewelry- bright colors. It makes me feel less guilty that she has to do this for me, if she gets some kind of enjoyment out of it.

A downside of being made out of assembled body parts is – well, alright, there are a lot of downsides. My appendages were selected for aesthetic value, and theoretically, they were also supposed to be the best and strongest limbs my manufacturer could find. But they still weren't made for each other.

The Creation

I'm built of pretty puzzle pieces that don't quite fit. Things are always falling off. Organs periodically need to be replaced. That's where Justine and her sewing kit come in.

At first my manufacturer used to make repairs, but with every session, I could sense his frustration. Nothing about me turned out quite the way he wanted it to. Even the sound of my voice seems to bother him – with almost every conversation, he'd tell me to speak normally, to rid my voice of its unearthly warbling quality. My "death rattle," he called it. The closest I could get was by pitching it higher, which I could never maintain for long.

Eventually, his annoyance and disgust towards me slowly began to outweigh his scientific curiosity, any sense of accomplishment at having made me.

Justine became the one bringing me tea, bringing me books, showing me how to make sense of the markings on the pages.

I was fascinated by her – being honest, I still am. The sleekness of her hair, the tiny perfections of her hands. Every feature fits together so perfectly, rather than being a patchwork of other bodies, other lives.

"How did Victor make you so smooth?" I asked at one point, touching her neck. At the time, I didn't know how invasive that was.

The Creation

“Victor didn’t make me,” she laughed, not flinching away from my pale, cold fingers. “His family took me in.”

“Took you in?”

“Yes – gave me a place to belong, people to belong with.”

I thought about it. “Will you take me in?”

Just as she didn’t flinch away from my hands, she didn’t flinch away from my words. She never embarrasses me with my ignorance, even when I become ashamed of my own actions in hindsight. “Of course!”

Right now, she’s getting ready to sew my arm back on, sloughing uselessly at my side like meat off a butcher’s hook.

She ties up my black hair, which has gotten rather long. It heartens me that anything about me can grow, makes me feel less like a reanimated collection of parts. Then she ties back her own, showing that smoothness of her neck that’s always fascinated me so.

“Do you like this color?” she asks, holding up a poppy-scarlet spool.

“Of course,” I say, because I like all the colors.

She sits down besides me and threads the needle, as easily as breathing. “Maybe you can practice your reading while we work.”

The Creation

She always says ‘we.’ While ‘we’ work. “I just sit here,” I remind her.

“Well, I couldn’t sit still the way you do.”

I read *The Tempest* out loud, turning through pages with my working arm while she reattaches the other one. Halfway through the page, I pause. “He’s like Victor. Prospero, I mean. He tries to get around nature, just with magic rather than science.”

“How could he do that? Magic is a part of nature.”

I consider this. “Science, too?”

“Everything humans do is part of nature. Because humans are a part of nature, and thus so is everything we create.”

She’s watching her hands, which I can only see working in my periphery. But I feel them. And I feel the implications of what she’s saying: I’m not unnatural.

I have my own quarters now. I don’t know whose idea it is, but I can guess. It’s simple – books on the bedside table, the empty teacup from last night, a patchwork quilt on the bed. But it makes me feel like a person.

Undressing for bed, I catch a look at myself in the long oval mirror that’s been put here for me. Every seam of my torso has been synched shut with bright colors, thread that glints like

The Creation

a shard of jewelry with every stitch. It's the first time I've beheld myself without disgust.

I turn to face the mirror fully, and run my fingers carefully over the seams. I may have been put together out of curiosity, not love. But love has been stitched into the very fabric of my being. I've been remade with love.

At my core, I feel warm. I feel alive. Not just an accident, not just an experiment, but a creation. A being made on purpose, one stitch at a time.

Dental Depression

There are holes in my teeth
born from sugar mixed with neglect
pulses of pain
I left alone to let
the rot fester in my bones
I poke my tongue over tiny crevasses
crying for protection
begging for intervention
Ignore, ignore deny and ignore
cavernous cavities
proof of abandon
Proof that it happened.

A Whole Process

He asked her to shave down there, and she knew it was because of porn. He had grown more insistent on it lately, which made resentment spring up in her throat.

He wanted her to shave down there? As he went around with his gross beard, which he had never asked her feelings about? It acted like a sieve, catching whatever was nearby—sweat, dandruff, snow, ketchup, bread crumbs, milk, pasta sauce.

Next thing she knew, he would ask her to shave her buttohole, too.

Well, at least she shut him down about anal sex. He asked once, pretending to tease, but she knew he was serious. She said, “You go first,” which she heard on a TV show and saved for years until the question came up. She was pleased with herself, although there was a brief pause before he laughed, where she considered for a terrifying moment that he would say, “Sure,” and then what would she do?

Growing up, she thought she looked weird down there, not like the pictures in her *What’s Happening to My Body?* book. One day she stood in front of her mom, pulled down her underwear, and asked, “Is this normal?”

Her mom said, “Yes, of course, everyone looks like that.”

And she thought, No. That can’t be right.

A Whole Process

She tried to fend off her husband by telling him, “You don’t know what this entails. It’s a whole process.”

“What do you mean? Don’t you just need shaving cream and a razor?”

“No. It itches like crazy if you just do that. You also need shaving oil and aloe vera. I get all these red bumps.”

“We can get whatever you need at the store. It’ll be fine. I’m sure you’ll be beautiful.”

What? Beautiful? Why did guys talk like that? Was this what they thought would win women over?

There was a thrum of excitement as she positioned herself in the shower, ready to hack away at her jungle. She propped one foot on the edge of the bathtub. Steam rose behind her.

He sat on the closed toilet lid. “Can I watch?” His pupils were so big, his eyes were almost black. She knew these eyes. Like they were having sex and he was about to come. Like she was falling into an inkwell.

The razor was sharp and new, and progress was fast at first. After each pass of the blade, she rinsed it off in the hot shower. But then she nicked herself and blood trickled down her leg. “Ow.”

“Oh, babe,” he said. “It’s okay. Just go around that part.”

A Whole Process

"You're doing great."

As she shaved, she uncovered thin, gray wings adorned with symmetrical black circles.

Then, thick, furry little legs.

Then eyes, which blinked.

Feathery antennae unfurled and started twitching wildly, investigating its new habitat.

"It hasn't seen the light in forever," she said to her pale husband. "So it may blink a lot, at first. It's just adjusting."

The Word Made Flesh

The winter morning forced me from the womb:
there I was fashioned, feature by feature,
in the swollen stomach of my mother,
my embryo a bulbous, bloody plume.

The cold climate of my nativity
would light the earth with sharper forms that day,
just as I was formed in the mould of my family
and tempered in accordance to their clay.

The umbilical cord was cut, unfurled;
what could I do but slobber, howl and sulk?
The sun was my bread and the moon my milk,
my navel was the centre of the world.

Born so, beneath the planets and the stars,
where the Milky Way glistened like an adder,
in honour of great Jupiter and Mars
I poured a fresh libation from my bladder.

Under the I-5 Outside Redding, California

Cars rushed by. The sun glared down at me, mocking me. I think it knew how much it irritated me, at least that's what it felt like. I was under a tiny bridge that supported a small section of the I-5 in central California, just outside of Redding. I had been hitchhiking my way to San Diego to see a few friends. That was no longer my goal. The grasshoppers and crickets made long, droning chirps around me. I had never been this uncomfortable. It made me want to claw at my skin. Yet I couldn't move, and I hadn't been able to move for some time, ever since that car came out of nowhere and shoved me down into this miserable hole. The sun was burning itself into my vision. I wished more than anything that I could shut my eyes, but they wouldn't budge. It made it worse that I could feel everything. I could feel my leg bending backwards under me, the bone poking out like a jagged knife. I could feel my shattered spine and how my ribs punctured my lungs. My intestines hung out of my abdomen. My brain was exposed to the elements. I couldn't stop thinking about how frightening a sight I must be.

I had died a few hours ago. Surprisingly, death was less painful than what I was experiencing now. It felt like an odd mixture of being high and extremely tired at the same time, the pain being barely noticeable. Now, I felt everything. No buffer of fading consciousness, no adrenaline to offset the pain, just raw, unfiltered agony. I wondered if someone would find me

Under the I-5 Outside Redding, California

soon. I wondered if the creatures of the desert would slowly tear me apart and disperse me throughout the land. I wondered if I would feel it all. The sun was unbearable. I tried to scream, but my jaw was broken and unresponsive. I felt nothing but anger. "What a stupid way to go out," I thought to myself. Flies started to land on my spilled intestines. I wondered what the point of this was. It felt like divine punishment of some sort. For some reason, I hoped that it was, maybe that would mean it meant something. I thought about how I died, how pointless it felt. I hoped that whatever was happening to me now would balance out how senseless my death was. The desert bugs started to crawl on my skin. The sound of the cars rushing by made me even angrier. Not only was I probably killed by some drunk who was operating one, I also had to listen to people ignoring me, ignoring my suffering. I prayed that someone would find me. I didn't know who I was praying to.

The sun finally set. It didn't bring much relief. I was still in a ditch outside Redding under the I-5, listening to cars drive by while bugs wriggled under my skin and birds picked at my flesh and flies swarmed around me. But at least the sun wasn't in my eyes anymore. I had a lot of time to think. The pain had started to fade into the background, like some undercurrent of suffering. I thought about what led me here. About why I didn't have a car and had to hitchhike. About whether it was worth dying

Under the I-5 Outside Redding, California

to see my friends down in San Diego. It wasn't like I was planning on dying, though. I thought about how I had taken so many unnecessary risks, risks that led up to this moment. I hadn't really cared about dying before; it felt like an afterthought to any dangerous action. I got angry thinking about that. If only I had known. I came to the realization that this probably wasn't punishment sent to me by a god or gods or whatever may be out there. There was no purpose in this, just like how there was no purpose in the way that I had died. Things happen when they happen. There was no plan for my future and there was no plan for my death and there was no plan for anything afterward. I felt hopeless. I felt angry again. I hoped this wasn't how things would be forever, but every second was proving otherwise. I tried to focus on the pain. Hopefully it will stop me from thinking.

It had been a week. My body was bloated and filled with pus and rotten blood and gas. It was so painful. The flies had laid maggots in my open abdomen and my eyes and my mouth. I could feel each tiny little thing wriggling inside me, burrowing and chewing and secreting and living. I was happy at their presence; it made the pain easier to focus on. In the brief moments where the pain would fade to the back of my mind, I would start thinking again. It was worse than any hell I had heard of. All my regrets and mistakes flooded into my brain. All my worry and stress and anger

Under the I-5 Outside Redding, California

came out. I would try to take deep breaths, but my lungs were filled with bugs, and my throat had collapsed. Eventually the pain would spike, and it would be my focus once again. I had accepted it would be like this forever.

It had been a month. Most of my flesh had been eaten or decayed. I was just a skeleton with a few lumps of tissue on it. It felt nice. I was sad that the bugs had gone, but occasionally a vulture or a fox would come and gnaw on my bones. I felt tranquil. I couldn't see anymore, but I knew that it was beautiful around me. I knew the sun still shined and the crickets and grasshoppers still chirped, and the cars still rushed by. I had accepted that this is how things were, and how things would be. It would never end, and I was happy.

Found Wanting

I have run on so long.
The colon, the bile, the gall,
each unloved, examined.
Wrap me, hide me in words
that float unpatterned
as my pulse, let me resist
affection, metallic and bitter.
Let me read on,
rest and not dream.
How do I let my blood
rock, how do I love me?

In the Hydro Corridor

I want to walk painlessly
on bare feet;
to be a free and innocent thing,
a spirit in the wild.

To take the plastic from my blood,
and feed it to a mushroom.
(My toxins transmuted,
my sins absolved.)

I am walking through the bush and the sun is setting
When a broad swath of cleared land
splits the woods in half.

Hydro One parted the trees,
opening new gametrail highways.

The animals who follow this path
have never known electric heat.

Only the buzzing of a transformer,
a red eye blinking through treetops,
the stoic statues of transmission towers,
marching over the hill.

I come here to ride my bike,
and to watch the deer and porcupine
indulge in the clover
that grow through the long meadow

In the Hydro Corridor

I set up camp at dusk
as constellations of fireflies
are flowing like Bealach na Bó Finne
through the underbrush.

All of these creatures bodies
are also full of plastic.

And all of them still move
with the secret magic of the world.

Sleep

For my brother, Greg

Diagnosis drear and sure, bone measured for mutiny,
blood, and knife. The kidneys

mentioning their distemper
hip, femur, knee; wearing the biblical frame.

Seven years seeking an end to this plague.
But the mind somehow nimble

ever the man of letters talking politics
with a self-same brief that catches glow--

law partners streaming by
the counsel of extended family, offering quick rebuttal.

Late the hour, the house quiet;
cancer, a stowaway upon this harrowed soul.

Nurses to measure the shadows for golden scissors.
Mother quietly scolding the night.

David your shepherd, to cheat darkness;
confession, a tax free exchange

in the sweet by and by
a panel van to lift your fiery headlights to a moonlit star.

Pick & Pluck

Pick and pluck
Skin from a hangnail
Discard and bleed
Pain swells and subsides

Skin from a hangnail
Like my high school friend's
Pain swells and subsides
Hands shredded after finals

Like my high school friend
I need a quick release
Hands shredded after you left
We were meant to be perfect

I needed a quick release
Discard and bleed
I am meant to be perfect
Pick and pluck

More Tests

The tube goes to my mouth.
I'm instructed to breathe out.
Instead, I cough, expiring
in waltz time, as though my lungs
are bleating "The Blue Danube,"

Outside the plexiglass booth,
the kindly tech purses her lips.
I know I'm making things difficult,
but that's what I've done best
with my life, so why stop now?

Though I will be stopping soon.
The date is coming up
like a landmark on a bus tour,
as certain as an end rhyme,
as sure as the swallows' return.

The morphine pills just block
me up. I almost prefer the pain.
For all the hurting, my mind
feels stronger, more concentrated
under this sentence of death.

The lab coats confront me
with results marked "Abnormal."
Another rock is placed on my chest.
Inquisitor, I'm ready to confess.
I was always this way and will die so.

cross section through the pelvis & learning moonwords

lie in the exile and speak gently to the cartilage:
|many women observe a large number of changes |
over the course of the menstrual cycle

fixed. opened. stitched. searched.
teach these hands; the body says most things.

the surgical lighthouse may witness the first birth of violation,
|patient tolerated brief assessment only |

it may shine with sympathy upon my stretched ligaments,
their encounters of bearing children, laying out corpses, *|anxiety|*

and unto the lips of a flower asunder - its name? my mother forbids me to speak
of it *|bimanual palpitation, cervical motion tenderness noted|*

the second time, I have known the experience of extraction,
learnt the names, of every part

*|vulva, vagina, cervix, uterus, adnexa:
ovaries and fallopian tubes, uterosacral ligaments, pelvic floor muscles|*

I have learned to not know the self is autolytic.
|high energy injuries with direct or transmitted trauma|

I learned of my history
is written on torn tissue: when force is transmitted through the body,
it remains and I leave, like pollen above white sheets and my
body

shrinking beneath my own eyes and these unteachable hands.
|patient meets criteria for expanded STI screening|

cross section through the pelvis & learning moonwords

I still plant a garden in the sky. And name every flower, Blood.
|blunt impact injuries result from direct contact of a blunt object with a body|

I was advised to examine the relationships
between the anatomic compartments and the moment the body became my body.

in that moment, memory was an arrhythmia, a closed up night beneath
my ribs, wanderlusting on cycle day 13. |luteal| there is a hex for him in
my mouth & it's not relevant now *|medical opinion|*

the moon, is a sickle, lodged between my hips. it is hard
to describe. the wings of the ilium unspread, opposing the pubic body

all tendons watching the connecting stars of the past. If it's full
and on it's way out *|you should see a doctor straightaway|*

N.B.: This poem contains re-arranged/rephrases found material from medical pamphlets from the Feminist Archive
East Midlands

I'll stare off into space
until you die



IRRITATION

Days of walking miles in your own shoes
slack-shouldered and dog-tired for the effort
begging the heavens above for one more shot
to make your soul as crusted and hardened
as that callous from your Chelsea boot
a scar bearing proof that the world
does nothing more than rub you the wrong way

[griefbody]



Second Opinion

When she walks into the morgue, Dr. Hannah Sheehan is blasting *Highway to Hell* on her Bluetooth speaker.

You wish more than anything you could tell her to shut it off.

But you *did* tell Sheehan she could pick the playlist when she was board certified. And she has been for years now.

It's her within rights to disturb the dead with AC/DC.

Sheehan stares at the autopsy table, sighs, and turns up the music to drown out the hissing ventilation system.

"The victim was likely female," Sheehan says. She examines what remains of the skull. "The mandible arch is narrow."

Sheehan pulls her hair into a low ponytail, which she should have done *before* approaching the remains, but you don't say anything. This is her morgue, her case. You're just here to observe.

And she's right about the mandible arch.

Sheehan plucks a spacer from the plastic instrument tray, and inserts it into the mouth cavity. She tries to open the jaw, but she's too impatient, too aggressive, and a crack punctuates the pause between *Highway to Hell* and *Girls Got Rhythm*.

And with that, every bone in this dead woman's body is officially broken.

Her face turns bright red: she's embarrassed. But the shame is fleeting, thank goodness; back when she was a fellow, a mistake like that might have paralyzed her. But Sheehan keeps moving forward. She takes her flashlight and shines it on the roof of the mouth; she's looking for what remains of the palatal rugae.

Second Opinion

“There’s not enough tissue left for that,” Sheehan decides. “She probably didn’t have a dental record, anyway. The state of these molars...so much decay...”

Or, she had acid reflux. GERD. A hiatal hernia. The possibilities are endless. She should know that. You *taught* her that.

Hells Bells is next. Sheehan starts bobbing her head.

“Looks like one of her premolars rotted right out of her head,” Sheehan says decisively, even though there are *dozens* of reasons someone could be missing a premolar.

Sheehan’s phone rings. She picks it up, putting the voice on speaker.

“When did you last feed him?” a voice asks.

Feed who, you wonder. A cat? A baby? You’re not sure. It’s been so long since you two last spoke.

“An hour before I left,” she says, to her boyfriend, or maybe her husband.

“Well, he’s crying,” the man says, as though he expects Sheehan to crawl through the phone screen and appear on the other side like the creepy little girl from *The Ring*.

Sheehan sighs, and you hope to all heaven that this idiot on the other line *isn’t* her husband.

It occurs to you that you never asked Sheehan about her personal life. Never wondered what she did when she wasn’t analyzing dead people’s teeth. Maybe if you had, you could have advised her not to marry some frat-turned-finance bro with the

Second Opinion

problem-solving skills of a sea sponge.

Maybe if you'd remembered things about her, she'd remember things about you. Like the premolar you had pulled in second grade. Or the fact that you had GERD.

"I'm coming home soon," she says. "Be there in twenty." She hangs up the phone.

You glare at her with disapproval, but she doesn't notice.

After all, you don't have eyes—not anymore.

Sheehan pushes your tray back into the morgue locker. She didn't find anything. You're still *Jane Doe*.

You're still a pile of bones in a drawer, listening to Brian Johnson's dulled voice scream-sing "*thunder*" over and over again.

But, you think hopefully, surely they'll call someone else in for a second opinion.

where i have pain and it is without origin

dear girl, there was a timer. a bomb to diffuse. you didn't notice? you let yourself grow older and you did not care? you had your chances, your life, your options. you have been anxious. you have been rigid. you have not had a child, selfish woman. you have medicated, you have unmedicated. you have washed your body carelessly. you have lost bets. you have imagined yourself as capable and assured. you have saved money, taken walks, practiced a marriage. you have had time, mismanaged. you have underutilized your hands. your body has failed spectacularly and it has been a show. did you know that you could experience this constancy of pain and not die? imagine that you can look at your entire life and not touch it. imagine that there is a film of glass, that you can unbecome yourself, that you will have to build it again but with sand, and ask yourself then if it is still your life, if it is something that you want. your body will never behave. is this the body you wanted, this suffering that you have? is it endless, this disordered flesh? try to be yourself, be less stilted. you are anxious and it is putting frost in your limbs. it is obvious when you are not behaved. you know what it sounded like when you had gratitude though you will never be certain if you had enough. think of this -- sometimes you may be able to move. sometimes you may almost feel warmth through the glass. sometimes the grit under your nails reminds you of human skin and you will be allowed in small moments to pretend it does not smell of rot. can you not rejoice? you are still alive. all of this is mercy.

After the Butchering

It takes my doctor three days to diagnose
internal bleeding, no outward signs to discern my fate.

But what of the sparrow beating wings
against window till its neck crunches and stills
in the shade of my dusty porch?

Your nose nestling against my throat, burrowing
past breathy promises, pulling away only
when I pull you in.

A swollen, violet bruise blooming springtime across my hips,
sickly green trickling down my thighs, a gruesome
scarlet letter branding me broken without breaking skin.

Displaced blood must collect somewhere, the lowest point,
the weakest flesh. I cannot walk without screaming.

Vile Bodies

The sickly flesh wants what it wants,
and moves to touch all that it yearns for.
Like a fly wiping its hands,
preparing itself for the feast
of vile, decrepit bodies.

And that's how I feel you see me
when we're in bed. All I think about
is how your stomach bulges out,
or how my arms aren't quite so fit.
Our bodies are so vile,

But you move closer. As you make
your way through mountains made of sheets,
and kiss me on the lobe (You know
just where to kiss) and make me feel
that maybe vile bodies,
have a charm all their own.

scarlet dusted palms

scarlet dusted palms,
droplets of red falling down the expanse of flesh;

head tucked towards her chest, heart
beating erratically; a fostered hope
that can never fully be hers.

whispers broken from laments, desperate to
share her pleas; to manifest
her existential visions;
fits that leave her body splayed out,
body shaking.

bright and vivid flashes; the touch of Saint Agatha's fingers
on her marred flesh, dancing to take away the pain,
tapping for comfort.

she weeps; sobbing as her heart aches and
the map of her burns seem to grow;
twisted on her hip, splayed out on her back.

her teeth grind and her bones ache, but the visions provide clarity;
they provide a reprieve; she forgot about the aching sensation in
her life lines, the scarlet dribbling down. . .
One drop. . .two drops. . .

scarlet dusted palms

her whispers remained hushed; delicate and fleeting as she
held her palms to her chest.

her fingers were interwoven, tightly as if held together
by the cement of her prophetic loyalty.

she pleads, wishing for another touch from Saint Agatha;
to be whole again; to be healed.

Patchouli

I've never liked the smell of patchouli.
Just the scent of someone walking past me
on the street wearing even a small drop
of patchouli, is enough to make me start coughing.

I was 7 years old when I realized my home
was different from other homes.
It was my first sleepover.
I was at my best friend's house,
watching how much they loved each other,
how my friend didn't hide and cower,
how no one raised their voices,
and how watching my friend's mom
do her makeup was something fun we could do,
and not something we needed to learn
so someday we could hide bruises too.

I was sixteen years old, when again
I realized my home was different from other homes.
My friends and I sat around each other
like girls do, when someone asked the inevitable question,
"Are you still a virgin?"
Then everyone would laugh and exclaim
if someone said no.
Then the next terrible question,
"How old were you?"
I had to stay quiet,
because I knew if I told the truth,
they'd never look at me the same way again.
It wasn't my fault, but a five year old
isn't supposed to know what I knew.

Patchouli

I never liked the smell of Patchouli.
My mom would dab it on her wrists and neck
each time she walked out the door for a date
with a new man, and never a good one.
I'd smell patchouli as she walked by,
sometimes, it would be the last time
I'd see her for days on end,
wondering if I should report her missing,
or if I'd catch hell for it when she finally came home.

Years later, I learned that they once used
patchouli in funeral parlors to mask the smell of decay.
I can't stomach patchouli.
It smells like the homelessness I experienced as a teenager.
It smells like the men coming in and out of our lives.
It smells like the man who laid his hands on me.
It smells like the bruises I learned to hide under my clothes.
It smells like the fake flowers lining a funeral home.
It smells like my mother leaving her children again, and again.
It smells like our empty fridge, stocked with nothing but decaying food.
It smells like my mother coming home, tears running down her cheeks.

It smells like my childhood, dying.

Shattered Soul Two



To My Daughters

You were the first I thought of
when diagnosed with what
strikes one in eight women.

It was too soon to leave you,
but I thought it a good sign
that none of us were born

under its pestilent zodiac.
I stared at the stars and wished
upon each one that you'd never

wake up as I did this morning
to one real breast and one fake one;
but that the memories you carry

will be only sweet ones, and then
I remembered you had your early traumas
of being born too soon, and losing

a beloved grandpa too young. I have
this urge to show you the scars
on the same breasts you both cuddled

as babies, but then I wonder why
you'd want to see my imperfections
and perhaps your destiny. I cave in

and show you anyway, hoping you learn
to eat well and visit your doctors, but then
I wonder if it really matters, as I remember

To My Daughters

what your grandpa Umpie used to say,
“When your time’s up, it’s up.”
May he always watch over you.



THANK YOU

Thank you for joining us in *The Body Archive* — a space where memory lingers in bone and story lives beneath the skin. These pieces, both haunting and compelling, remind us of the histories we carry and the voices we preserve together.

To our readers D.W., Jillian, Ire, Solly, Emily, Cedar, Nora, Lela, Niani, Chloé, Catalina: your attention, curiosity, and care breathe life into every page. We are grateful you're here.

Warmest Regards,

Madisen & Kelly