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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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meat

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in English

by

Husayn Burris Carnegie

Thesis Committee:
Professor Michael Ryan, Chair
Professor Amy Gerstler
Professor Catherine Barnett

2016

DEDICATION

To

everyone I have ever loved

you have kept me here far longer

than I expected.

And time? Time is the salty wake
of your stunned entrance upon
no name.

Li-Young Lee
“Night Mirror”

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

meat

By

Husayn Burris Carnegie

Master of Fine Arts in English

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Michael Ryan, Chair

I write poems because I am sad. I write poems because I think that all of us are sad, are inherently sad, and have precious few tools to cope with this. Which is not to say this text is an exploration of the human condition of sadness, but rather, that this is a text filled with sad poems. I wrote these poems by looking inward first, then by looking outward. What follows is what I saw. I do not know if these are good poems or if these are bad poems, but they are surely sad poems. They are my poems and they have helped to keep me here.

the small amount of jesus that i have

birthdaypoem: twentyfive

two bodies sit adjacent on route to Ocho Rios
one a mantis
one her prey

you are very pretty the prey says to a spot around her knees
and he means it, because she is

you're a freak the mantis says to the hole between his eyes
and she means it, because he is

the prey isn't so much prey
as he is a set of concentric circles—
when self sloughs off self enough
you get the pool of being seen here

the mantis is in every way a mantis
and is delighting in that fact
she is very pretty
and she plans to eat him

*

when the horse you bet on has a heart attack
right before the finish line
is as good a time as any
to stop gambling
maybe your life just isn't very good maybe
it's not supposed to get any better

*

all the while it is you who is making this story

eating these words and passing them through the channels
of your failures into song

the breaking and the cadence
the disquiet of this close

all the while it is you who is lightning

teetering on the pivot
between existence and illusion

if you were a fan you would have no moving parts
and you wouldn't even whisper

you would just sit there—a pool between two deserts

adomma

"An enslaved man had decided to die by hunger strike. Captain Timothy Tucker tried to force him to eat. He horse-whipped him to a raw and bloody pulp. He threatened to kill him. The nameless man uttered one word: adomma so be it."-Marcus Rediker

I knew someone once who wouldn't write soda
in her poems pop, pop is a better poem word
she said well what do you call soda
I asked well soda she said but not
in her poems always pop
in her poems.

This is why no one trusts each other I told her
because of how full of shit you are
and sure soda isn't a pretty word
it's an ugly word
most likely, but it matters doesn't it
and I think at this point I was crying.
She was trying to unhinge herself
from the conversation all I meant was
I didn't mean anything by it.
You know it really is bullshit
how pretty you are and unreasonable
your expectations of words can be
and I was definitely crying at this point
and other people on the bus were crying
and assailing the backs of the seats in front of them.
Your body is not at all like pus I said
which is good, it is very good
but do you really have to rub that in my face
and everyone was screaming soda now
stamping their feet and chorusing with the people next to them.
Well what words go in your poems
she asked while crawling out the window.
All the words and notwords at my desk I guess.

october, 2772
the age of reason

How foolish we'll all be
for thinking love is a thing
outside our poems.
Everything is explained by silence
can have its magic torn from it
by sitting in that space.

Men have always liked men
in the same breath
that we have liked bayonets
and running them through everything
we have always liked *our* women
even when asserting ownership even
in our terror at becoming them.
Men, you see, are hypocrites
and cancers, the basest
human nature with a voice.

Love, we'll find, is a literary construct.
The naming of a thing we don't possess.
And no, the world will not
have ended. It will just be colder
overrun with squirrels and glinting chips
of mica that fit inside its rifts.
I will be happily archaic my failings
attributed to time instead of me.

beetles

for Doc Townsend

We strip from them their eyes and sit these in the hollows of our ears
to improve our lovemaking. The eyes we think retain a memory
distinct from that of the greater brainspace. This is what we're after—
the eyebrain. It makes no use of dendrites, just moving pictures
and when the brain becomes a drive-in how good the sex must be.
Based solely on appearances the eyebrains resemble vinyl
and we are not above appearances so we place them along
with needles in our ears and let them play. The wings we grind
with pestle our clothes we strip with haste and then we mist ourselves
with oil—we dance in the phosphorescent godstorm of their throwing.
We take at last their arms and feet and glue, hot glue, them to our own.
We flip the lights, let these cilia guide us forward in charged darkness.
Here we are not hasty. Here the drift as important
as the joining. We two hairy glaciers on the carpet.

homage to catalonia

It is nice to be a Rhodes scholar in the mornings
over tea and Orwell. Until you learn the fun
is in Barcelona. The most beautiful men
in the world are anarchists in Spain
second only to those Communists
in Spain who were anarchists
at heart, but loved the poor
too much to turn
their backs.

But that was 1936
and those men
have grown old
and dead.

Do not think you can replace them.

part with her

love isn't so different from anything else
in that it cannot be defined
like jello too green to wrap
your mind around like spookfish
hoarding all the light like
oils of different ilk eaten
or worked into the skin
then swallowed slowly
like the third time you encounter death
not sooner, sooner you are stupid
not later, later you are callous
rocklike in your shapelessness
any rock, every rock, you are all

inhale the ocean
close it in, take it with you
learn the fish who live within
and mime the patterns that they swim in
become your own voyeur—see yourself
the moon reflected on your surface
grow accustomed to the sloshing of discomfort.

abacus abacus

count my selves.
in the least there are three
millions is more likely.
each second receiving a me
in flux the image of a me
just past, gorillame
the me that litters
the runt that wears the clothes
the models say, the war
the war is me. the me
is justifying hunting
is using every scrap
of every bloody piece
the me is contemplating
hunting cops. today
the me is tasked with
writing policy to quell
the riots of a future me.
today the me is failing.

the me is lonely caught between
the lamplight and a cigarette
aware we do not yet have tools
to build on mars. the me does not
accept this the me believes that we
can build on anything regardless of
the moral efficacy. the me is drunk
and building legos is more or less the lego
form of me. the me has limbs, has hanging
flaps of skin at odds with the feted image
of himself his mind has crafted, and is saddened.

each me is mother and my father
my friends and all my sins.
each is living in the shadow
of its coming and each will let me down.

the way that meat goes

As a concession to her beauty he sunk into himself and pulled
the pieces most admired. His complexion. His politeness
as a child. The way he speaks about his friends the way he speaks
about his dearest enemies. He pulled his language and features
from his mother. As a concession to the habits of her mind
he pulled what hung in balance. Who he planned to be, the most recent
of his meals devolving in his gut. He pulled the most minor of his organs
the lusts that clung him to this earth, the distrust he holds for men.
In concession to her patience he pulled pieces he dared not
see himself. The knowledge of his coming death. Ill he'd done his father.
These and more he pulled—fashioned firm with putty and stuck them
to her body. Eight years he didn't sleep. Eight years he pulled and stuck.
Till their union grew too large. There wasn't space to move. There wasn't space
to say *i love you*. So he left. Fell softly from his body and stared up at a concord
of his making. He fell as softly as he could and thought about his absence.
In this way, love is both a blessing and a sickness. As a squirrel dead beneath an Aspen
is at once a fallen grace and the beginnings of a fern. Let him still god. Let him settle into nothing.

there are many kinds of hangover that are worse than the drinking kind of hangover

The first kind is after recess. Everyone in class has called you mudface and you are in your desk only everyone is in there with you and you had no idea how loud it would be, how hot your eyes could get. You just want to be in the hall, at the fountain, in Australia somewhere. You want to be a Komodo Dragon. You want toxins in your acid. You want bacteria in your toxins. You want to throw up on everyone.

sometimes while singing you swallow too much shampoo are hospitalized for too much shampoo
sometimes

she leaves you

you are a whale hunting seal pups
you are beached as you knew you might be

you are the refrigerator after a power outage
just a box
 of melting
 of rottingmess

but the very worst kind
is aging

when hurting isn't
hurting so much
as always

hello wrinkle
you are new today

wrinkle is all that is new today

no amount of gingersucking glass
after glass after glass of water

no hair of the dog or deepest sleep

will make this any better will make this

any less

no ibu no caffeine

no shaded rooms and candles

no lover's scratching no parent kisses

no perspective on the broader problems in this world

will hold the tide of this one.

why sad drunk happens

everyone is not worth loving

and there is no *until*

for us to fall back on

and really, there is only

the moon and small deeds

done by gibbons

to keep us in this world

theology

you become scripture when shared / that's how it works
scripture

unpacking the rolled tshirts of the self / and handing them to whoever needs a tshirt
not just cold people

but also those with terrible fashion / those who are so hot
they have sweat through their current tshirt

all their tshirts at home even / and a new one could help them land a job
a girlfriend or a conversation friend on the bus ride home

some will be handed to communists / known communists
black communists even

others will go to tshirt enthusiasts / who have all the tshirts they could want
but they love tshirts: folded, loose, framed, excessive, obsessive

your job is to be quiet / to hand out tshirts
smiling

*

the woman in the grocery store is slicing cheese
she is breaking all the rules she is
giving the cheese away for free
she is humming the eurythmics
she is wearing no bra—
her breasts are bouncing everywhere
and yes all the cheese is free

*

rinse the humidifier with vinegar
let it sit
rinse it clean
fill it with yourself
good, good
you are scripture

birthdaypoem: twentysix

The loping coyote in the distance looks
chilly in the lamplight. God you hope it is a lynx
you hope it is four lynxes wandering this night
as some mimetic coyote puffed up and scary
with significance. They pause they see you
they recognize your form. They coo
you are not invited and again you are alone
walking the yards of this all too wealthy suburb.
You change your gait a little, you make all your mother's foods—
oxtail, cornmeal porridge, curried goat.
All her favorite drinks—lemonade with cayenne,
teas from different mints, vinegar for the gut.
You make all your mother's clothes, all her patterns.
You try her kindness out on other people
you overturn the birdbaths that you pass
and then you run. If you were four sad lynxes
you'd set fire to your fur and lope through all the world
catching blaze. If you were any of these neighbors
you'd build obelisks in every corner of your yard
you'd have slaves to build your obelisks.

But you are not your wealthy neighbors
you measure everything you own. Your post-it notes
and bungee chords your change jar
and the sweat stains in your mattress.
Tired, you build your own obelisks
you kiss everyone you meet.

Time is slipping up you think. Is getting old.
Time is nonexistent, a story told to you as memories.
Tonight you are your neighbor and immortal.
You are your mother and four lynxes
you are good animals, and you deserve this song.

this is who has kept me here

birthdaypoem twentysix still: how people in socks climb steep inclines
for Carole Anne Taylor

The first man who is naked has a molehill
for a gut and his back narrows into his pudding
pop of a butt. He is perfectly balanced—
molehill in front buttpop in back. He leans up
on his toes he reaches high he smiles.
You are happy for the Grand Spa
and its room after room of butts.

You follow your rounded saint to the steam room
you become the popping water in a kettle
or a waterbug caught in a hot spring
boil. The steam room is hot, hotter
still if you stand on the uppermost bench
think as steam and stretch your hands up to the ceiling.
Then it is hotter than the hot you think a steam room is—
it is painful, cleansing, but not as lonely as you hoped.

So you leave for the cold pool, you don't jump in.
You sink in slowly left leg first hoping it will freeze
and snap and you will slide forward onto your right
which will freeze and snap and you, a torso
and a head now, will plummet to the bottom
of the pool and join your shrapneled limbs.
But the cold pool is not so cold as to freeze and snap
a human so you just lie there, arms wide, and cool
your insides which have been burning.

The tepid pool becomes your couch of water.
It has a big tv in front of it playing gameshows
and you watch these teams of young
Koreans all of whom are fit and beautiful.
They compete to see who can climb
the bodies of their teammates fastest
to the top of a steep incline. They are wearing socks
the incline is wearing slick gray metal
and they can't help but fail and fail.
They are stepping on each other's faces
and no one seems to have done this before
and the big bodies made up of all their small bodies
eventually tip or bend and slide down the incline.

All you knew of Carole's illness was her lungs were bad,
that, and something about germs was bad.
Your recent visits were to the outsides
of her house and she had to practice blowing kisses.
All you know right now is how good a place
for breeding germs this pool must be.
You hate germs you hate pools you hate tv

and you leave the tepid couch as soon as you remember this.

You go to the room that says no napping and in it
is the molehill man spread across two resting pads.
His butt is not on either mat he seems everywhere at once.
God is it nice to see him napping in the room
that says no napping. To see a form sprawled
beyond the confines of one resting pad and outwards
unencumbered by the furniture or the signs
and smiling, even in this deepest brand of sleep.

slave woman seated
for Eliza Harris

The lunatic is sitting somewhere near
last seen as a tiger nut
waterlogged and sodden
just moments after being red
or lost in red
as when a lily beetle tucks
its legs in on a calla lily.

The lunatic is sitting on a pile of silk
is sewing up her wounds is
wincing at her wounds
and at the sewing,
but the parts of silk
not threaded through her skin
feel nice—feel cool against her legs.

The lunatic keeps waking
to new cuts
to new redness
on her person and around her,
but the cuts,
and redness
are worth suffering anew.

summit

In the outside, my shirt slides
off and snowflakes prick my skin
as it retreats. I am hopping
on my left foot
trying to remove a wooly sock
from the sweating clutches of my right.
You undress as well, but all at once—
everything you've ever done occurs
like this, in singularity.
In fluid graceful gestures
infinitely heavy
with aplomb.
Your breasts are easily
the best that I have ever seen
and even better
you are smiling, slightly
as if to apologize
for such perfection.

My life will be easy
to quantify and forget
by adding all the nights
I couldn't sleep to satchels
filled with my suicidal thoughts.
My sons will point to every time
I ate the batter off an onion ring
as proof that I lived a life without significance
and they will loot
and sing of looting.

But for now,
it is a joy to watch you standing,
still, but somehow slightly swaying
in and as the wind.

all their meat and more

on meatnight his parents call us down from wrestling
and serve an oversized meat maybe moose

with options being A.1. and mustard.
we share the forks and mind the tines of angry hair

and for knives we use our hands and for napkins
there too we use our hands. meatnight

is the second of every month
and the only time of all the time

in their home with their son
that we are called for dinner.

*

the woman from the hallway's headnods
committed suicide last night.

i squish the orange i am holding
all down my shirtfront and coax my body

to the hallway. i nod myself to sleep i sleep
myself to coping. it is some time before i wake

to a narrow sea of nodding neighbors.
if we are the last to die in this hallway

what songs will they sing of us
what will be done with our ashes?

*

trainlady 17 is cut from cloth
that i have never worn never

even seen before. her shirt
is half way up her belly

and she hits herself with the right
hand of an attendant. *feel that shit.*

feel that woman shit she says.
trainlady 17 sees me watching.

she is beauty as it was first explained.

she says *both i and this will pass.*

i can take that as a terror
or i can take it as a solace

i can take this all as fiction
and immortalize myself in language.

*

just warm it for me grandpa says
of bacon, ten seconds to a side

no crisping, and get it to my mouth as quick
as quick. this will keep me young so just you hurry

and i hurry because i love him.
we drive the car he pinches me and screams

the ants! the ants are getting after everything
what kind of car can't seal out ants?

we drive me to the carman and hop around
and point to pepper shrimp on the upholstery

and scream what kind of car is this! to let in shrimp?
we take me to eat mangos

and like the massai drinking blood
we take the stringing pulp for what it is—

an honor and a ceremony
and a daily daily thing.

*

the woman at the flea market is selling
ICE NOT A SCAM!

her signs keep a lid of sorts
on all her dancing

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE BUYING
WHAT U NEED RITE NOW

and she is jangling her tambourine
to the rhythm of falling quarters

HOT AINT IT
NO CHEMICALS!

she pulls them out of nowhere these signs
her dress a vortex made of jacquard weave

DON'T BE A SQUARE EAT A SQUARE
H2ORGASM

and all the other vendors are glaring at her growing line
even as they too start to dancing

*

trainlady 8 wants to be a voyeur—
to find meaning in the secret lives

of others. i'm not projecting
she tells me so. she buys me dinner.

recounts the carrots and the crackers
i've been eating, insists. she tells me

how her husband passed—what he looked like
as a man, what he looked like in his coffin.

she tells me how she takes the train now.
up and down the coast.

but really just for oregon.
you can mourn a death in those trees she says.

*

in montana, where the foothills meet the big hills
and the ghost trees stick their milky stalks

up from the soil, i am shown a welcome
worthy of a station higher than my own.

not by people. the people mostly eye me sideways
or up and down searching for the smallest reason.

i in turn lock eyes, and like the closest pines
faces shorn to clear the path for roving whites

i hold the sullen gaze that far better
have been felled for.

*

i've seen her throw it up
those meats too rich after years

of chickpeas and guinep and mixmash
yam and cassava. excuse me

where's your restroom?
and she is really truly smiling

and very grateful.
you can tell them

you don't eat meat
but i do i mean i can

and she is throwing up
and this is love i think

both parties giving of their meat
when it's not pretty.

*

in the candy bread and ethnic aisle
where we have finished off our mounds bars

she shoves me over laughing and
plays at biting off my ear mike tyson!

mike tyson! she chants and here
she asks to end it. while we are happy

she says while the picture that we take
with us is of us smiling.

when parents die

At three he wakes in sweat—
leans over and grips her tightly

next morning he makes breakfast
bacon first, then kale and sundried tomatoes cooked in its fat

he climbs into the pan, waits there:
this isn't how it's supposed to be.

Yesterday was his third day eating hot dogs
only hot dogs

if you can't beat them join them
become the hot dog

his father always said
but then

So today is kale day
leafy, Tuscan kale day

for breakfast and then for lunch
and for snacking in between

and he will not cut himself
and he will not drink

daughters and sons

And the boys in the allblack
blacktinted audi slow down lean out
so cool from the windows and holler
hey beautiful
marry me big thighs marry me big lips oooh
oooh goddamn marry me tonight
in this car tonight
and I will make you sing
to the group of women walking under the bridges of Broadway.
Not Manhattan Broadway, Brooklyn Broadway
with all its potholes and stores that sell checks cashed
and taxes and cash for gold and beer.
They get no response but they feel good
feel they have done good
and they continue to roll past slowlike
until they get to a girl hunched over her canvas shoes
tying up her canvas shoes for the third time tonight.
Her glasses are falling off the odd angle
of her face and her bookbag is a hunchback
and they yell *nerd*
and her bookbag tips her over as she looks up.

Nerd is the woman who I think about
when I'm supposed to be thinking about money
or how to rid myself of this cold I've been having.
The boys in the allblack
blacktinted audi are who I think about
now that I'm old and should be forgiving people their peopleness.

hit your head and fall into the world i'm making

if i lean over an i kiss you now an i say you're pretty
an i say i'm weird an i say i'm sorry an i say you're pretty
cause damn god you're pretty what will you do and where
will your hands go? on me on you on armrests tight as you can
squeeze them? how fast will you jump up how mad will you be
how hard will you kiss me back? how long can you tell me
in minutes will our lips be touching how long can you tell me
in seconds will we hold our breath when we're done? how big
this time in lifetimes will you remember my face an my name
an my lips? how big only now talk in trucklengths the chance
that we do this again with each other with new others?

an i swear i'm sorry. i know this isn't good isn't usual i know
the boundaries i am crossing the implicit trusts that i am
breaking. it's just this one time that i want this with a person
who is smiling with a person whose bags are neat and have prints.
i cannot know how long i'll be here i cannot know how long
my body can enact the desires of my mind and just this once
i'd like to try this with a person i've respected. you can say to stop
you can say you're sorry you can tighten up recoil into the way back
of your seat. an i swear i'll stop an i'll say i'm sorry it's just this one time
that i've felt this. you can do most anything in this moment an i'll think
you're pretty an i'll say i'm sorry an maybe you will kiss me back.

GOOD NEWS FOR YOU DARLING

in the cusped folds
of finite memory

there's little room
for all my blessings.

the child who held
the door for me

this morning was the
persian man who said

my dreads were art
last week, and even he,

i think, was really
just my mother stripping

birchbark to make
paper on which

she'd write *best pals*
my child, best pals.

there's hardly space
for all the faces that

i know, so new ones
i file away as yours—

all freckles are your
freckles all slouching

profiles your slouching
profile. my god

how many yous
i see each day.

on the playground.
mowing lawns.

in all the art i own.
you are good magic

dearest. you are magic
cold and potent.

i an i is sorry

if a friend of yours has died and you find out in an email.
for Joe Krall

Dream yourself as cardboard. Still your mind. Stiffen
then dream yourself as rain. Let the softest tension
hold yourself together as you fall.
These selves are just formalities
what is one way from another?
Dream yourself a wounded boar
tusks wet with hunter's blood.
Dissolution comes in many forms.
Dream yourself a friend. Heavy, draped in cotton.
Dream of that embrace from their perspective.
How hard they hold you how hard they love you.
Dream yourself a graceful constellation
how hot you are how cold the blackness where you live.
Apologize for who you are, for everything you have ever done
for failing through sheer force of will to keep them with you.
Sing yourself a poem. The only poem that there is, about death—
ours and those we love rewritten over centuries, refigured and reworked.
A language we fall into, a language we let fall over us.

girl i call Tall Shoulders

in absence of queens english i turnfoot in a little
mumble *hey*. *hey* is trappings i don't have, is ash
on brownblack skin. *hey* is *sorry*, *hey* is *maybe?*
and all of me as music. this is the sonnet i was made for—
ugly breaking, ugly words, the ragged outline of my inner.
say the numbers of your childhood. crossleg yourself across from me.
how many bikes. how many kisses. how many bugs.
uncross your legs crisscross your arms look me dead.
say the numbers of your future. how many blessings.
how many scars. how many days without surprise.
i am listening, scooch closer. touch your knees to mine.
i will say my numbers. i will talk my being into air.
who i couldn't be. my bugs in order of their wingspan.
how tall i stretch for. the abyss i know we sit beside.

what would MLK do?

for far too many brown folk to name

em is curled up to the couch and i am curled up
in her pocket and she is scrunching
then unscrunching all my hair
we feel like shit the two of us

she asks when will they shoot you and do you worry
and i say never and not really but
what i'm thinking is when will they rape you
and do you worry i'm worried she says

we both are sort of passports
in that we get each other places
and we feel like shit the two of us
for needing passports
and we feel like shit so often it seems
when all the other poets are reading chekhov

and that's just it having a gun popping it off
skipping the step where it's brown people you point it at
skipping the step where it's the dick you wanted
and it's women who you point it at

the tv tells us that mr king would not be throwing
things about this but the tv has forgotten
that mr king is dead was shot
so how the hell can he know
what he thinks

but maybe tv has a point because just yesterday
no one was out there looting
and there must have been a gun
a pointed somewhere
and not in no damn play
so how come only sometimes
do we do this

and that's just it isn't it
so much bad you cannot loot it all
you cannot stand there quiet up to all of it

so we just sit here
scrunching and unscrunching
and feeling like shit the two of us.

hitting women

he is the corduroyed boy
heard *no* he is standing
in the breach between
anger and shame he is
a weight of others

his father said not
to take no for an answer
how to shake a man's hand
like the neck of a chicken
you will break soon
you will eat soon

his father used to call them
all pussies as he ate
the last piece of chicken
used to slap his mother
on the ass or cross the face

he is the cottonbellied boy
who used to set his pets free
and before that
his sister's dolls free
and before that
he used to cry

his mother gave him pennies
for his chores gave him
pennies just for nothing
his mother gave him everything
in his pockets everything
that he could ever hold

he is not a boy at all
he really liked this girl
and this is how he shows it.

*

she is the roughcheeked girl
who wants the slickness
of her body for herself
to wander over

her teachers pulled her
near told her that her skirts
distract the other students
that her grades have slipped
as well and take those

headphones off they said

her mother says she's worried
by the music in her room
says she hasn't seen her smiling
and who will want to meet
a bag of frowns

she is the yipping mudterror
who used to run through all
the house putting salamanders
in cupboards and pressing herself
into the cushions of the couch

her father used to smile at this
her mother used to scream
whose daughter was she
as she bathed her with
the coarsest sponge they had

she has practiced saying *no*
she has had to practice
saying *no*

folk remedies

Everything I have done has hurt someone
hurt everyone in fact
and knowing this is
my evenings, is rocks
of different sizes and sharpness
shifting in my stomach.

The tea my mother sent is from her garden.
I could not tell you how many mints it has.
It has never leveraged vulnerability
or withheld anything from one who asked
and this, my mother says, lends it strength.

it hurts a lot and i know that is indulgent is selfish in its nature but this is language failing
gorg-o-mish nightclub, vancouver

lonely. how are you? fuck. that's the feeling
maybe sick, maybe stuck in my own language.
is everyone a gunman? three thousand miles
and it's still so close to *run man* so close to them
still dancing still being there for children and for fucking
for dying sometime later *run man*. we too were in the dark
we too saw god in all his forms—in bodies and in music
in blackness and in beams of light dancing in that blackness.
we saw god in sweat—saw her in the wet and heavy air still
between the pockets of our bones. all of us had bodies
and all those bodies were good bodies. bodies who gave
themselves to other bodies in good faith in instinctive knowledge
of the terror that surrounds us. how can bodies do this?
how can i be angry? how can i be anything at all and by what grace
am i allowed to be here? by what chance am i still moving?
by what god? by what accident? by what language?
i know and i am sorry. there have always been dancers
there have always been killers. there have always been stories.
feeding what? feeding bodies feeding us—we big thirsting meatsacks.
there have always been stories and they have never been quite right.

she is probably not coming back

The sunlight entering the hole
cut atop the yellow bellpepper
stays itself inside the makings of the hollow.

It is comfortable in this skin
and thinks that maybe from without
it is the second coming of its source—
a rich and blooming orange verging on eruption.

I feel bad telling it that really
it looks like all the other bell peppers
picked too young. Its ripeness
blossoming but not as yet
manifest in the richness of its hue.

Or worst like one of history's beheaded children
skin inked red with blood then rinsed clean
by evening rain then yellow
with the passing days of autumn.

I feel bad because the bellpepper
will not hold its light for long
and so this momentary sun-ness
(even if I take it at its word
and not the headless bag of body
I can't keep myself from picturing)
will be subject to the wrinkling of age

or the edge of the paring knife
the gnash of human teeth or the settling
of so many fruit flies in its gut.

I feel bad that unlike rain smashed
into the window of a moving train
in winter, it will have no second coming
no second go at beauty in a different form.
Not directly. Not like ice.

myself as beetle

a beetle sleeping
in a mason jar
says *hello* says
i do not think i love you anymore

the jar is filled with gasoline
his mouth is filled with rose petals
and rose petals are full of scorn

you are a modern day stoning
a peeling birch that never
seems to fall
you are winter at its coldest

the beetle is just now learning
he never loved you
that gasoline is toxic
that he has only loved himself

the jar is doing its best
to preserve this

you are aging wonderfully

birthday poem twentyfour: ignoble

Everything is soon
I'll have a daughter
will run from her
as rabbit did
in sweat and parallel
to death
Soon there won't be
time for other selves—
to try out love
on other women to be
an arsonist and not a goat
to be a pluot and not the fruit
that's always sad at night
Soon I'll fail to build a cabin
to keep me company
or be at ease inside
my body I'll call her up
again and find my voice
too old to say *I'm sorry*
Soon I'll spill things write
things down and experiment
with eating insects
I will go longer and longer
between showers

Soon I'll take to sleeping
in my coffin will leave my
clothing by the hinges
in a pile and find it doesn't
help things much at all
and then I'll die
in the boring way
that people do

birthday poem twentythree: too noble

left below the shadow of the osprey nest
i come back to glisten. i come back to imitate myself.
my sweetcane legs. brown burls i had for shoulders.
i come back to imitate my soul. to imitate my noble.
i hear all the stories. i cannot run
across a fallen birch. i cannot scramble up a live one.
i come back to see how come.

these holes i shared with rabbit. we two peas.
i could fit where rabbit fit. or nearly.
i had juice stains down my front samaras in my hair.
rabbit hardly noticed. sometimes i chirped.
sometimes i did a lion. he just get into the chickweed.
i lived my inner pinball. tucked my elbows. bounced
off dying trees. he just get into the clover.
you are no bear he seemed to say *you are no hawk*.

even as a pinball i was holy. even as a lion.
the trees they praised my beauty. *you are radiant*
they said through tears *you are hot white gold*
they said while swaying. *we have never seen your equal*.

i ran away too often. i see that now. see the groundwork laid
for all my current failings. moms poncho in my pack.
moms rainstick in my pack. everywhere i went i rainedanced.
i wanted everything to drown. just not rabbit.
he could stay i figured. and me and him
could marco polo in the torrents. he would share his clover.
i would paint his fur a pagan red. and everything would drown
at the bottom of my dreams. and even us we'd drown
at the bottom of my dreams.

the dying art of smalltalk

you are so quiet

lately

she has been saying
for quite some time now
to which

i nod
and smile.

i've been thinking of jalopies
and all my parts—

a head

filled through with rust
and everywhere

limbs hanging

limbs weighing and dragging
and scabbed.

and maybe it's ok

to just get up

sometimes

to make it

out of bed

and sit within the world

sans sex or crooning

goodnothings

What shall I do with this body I've been given
or the bed of moss between my treehouse
and the squirrel's house? What respect is owed

to things so fragile and hardly living
that children's feet and words can hurt them so.
We are piñatas (men) lined with krackle

and those chalky hearts we gave as kids
to girls whose mothers knew our mothers
but not well enough to stop us.

We are fine filaments (men) mere vessels
verging on incandescence. How can I
explain this? We are Francium we are lint

caught too close to sparklers except when
we are sparklers setting blaze to lint.
It is unparalleled the damage we allow

ourselves to do. We are pestles (men)
mashing all around us. We are the sickest
joke this world must live with.

We are everything that mothers warn
their daughters and their sons about.
We are everything that fathers warn

their daughters and their wives about
we are grand theater (men)
and not enough of us are sorry.

birthday poem: twentyfive still

this is a story where the hero was always
dead. against all expectations
amidst all forms of conquer
he was chiseled shade—
rescuing m'ladies kneedeeping
his way through treachery, *eastward*.
which is not to say that he was seeking
any god, or even any light
but rather, that he had conquered
all that he could conquer
westward, so why not.
which is odd really
because he wasn't a very good hero
and even now he isn't a very good hero
and in this way the story changes

to a story where a man
can never die. up against the bristled snout
of precedent, mocking all intention
he is painfully corporeal—
eating the same meals, shitting
always shitting, the same meals
and trying on the different forms of pain
in turn. which is not to equate his suffering
to a martyrs. his is lived through
is known in advance to be lived through
which strips back a bit of luster to reveal
a largely lusterless man
and in this way, again
the story changes

this is the story of a boy
lost in self. low down in some
vale thicketed by brush
he is peering at his selves
all of whom are dancing, saddancing
little circles dancing their way through fistfights
and quiet car rides
dancing through all the people getting gunned
down in the news
dancing as their mothers' cook and scold and die
as their girlfriends come and leave and die

until, after a time, he dies
and in this way the story changes