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Friends Is Never Dreary

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Friends Is Never Dreary

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Poetry

by
Megan McHugh
B.A. New College of Florida, 2005
May 2014

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Friendship as a Way of Life: A Preface

[In]the United States, even if the basis of sexual misery still exists, the interest in friendship has become very important...toward friendship, people are very polarized. How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? This notion of mode of life seems important to me. It [friendship] can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized.

– Michel Foucault, interview, *Gai Ped*, 1981

This conversation primarily about gay lifestyle titled “Friendship as a Way of Life” speaks to the non-traditional relationship building that extends far past sexual actions in queer communities. It is not the fact of me having sex with a person of my same gender that threatens patriarchy; the threat lies in the relationships between myself and those around me who enable this kind of sex. Queer relationships of all kinds have to be invented. We don't have centuries of culture dictating how we are to act around one another. We are making it up as we go along.

The other day, my friend Gabriel called me to coordinate the delivery to his P.O. Box in Puerto Rico of twenty bars of dark chocolate that he had left at my house. He is convinced the chocolate helps his brain, and he needs it badly. And who am I to argue? We started talking about poetry. He said he wrote poems because they allow him to fix the ephemeral, like bottling up the smell of a flower. I thought what he said romantic, but not for me. When I write a poem, it isn't like pinning a beetle to an index card. Nothing fixes or concretizes, except maybe the black strokes on the screen or paper. I believe it's a living thing that changes and moves.

My poem “You Never Know, Daytona” concerns itself with movement and the ambiguity of queer identities/relationships. The poem borrows language from a different part of the interview, where Foucault discusses the formlessness of queer relationships: “They [two

men] face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other.” I love a gesture or movement that refuses to assure the reader. I love this invention despite so many unknowns.

“No one has imagined us,” Adrienne Rich wrote in the first of “Twenty-One Love Poems,” speaking exactly to this sense of freedom and obscurity. We have so few examples, that I still come back to that series intending to subvert the Petrarchan tradition, for inspiration to fill in a few more of the gaps, to be a witness to other ways of life. Frank O’Hara is another poet I’ve turned to for example. I adore the way he invokes relationality in his poems, using his own social life to portray a speaker indelibly connected to those around him in a way that is decidedly queer. There might not be any assurance about these relationships, this life, but there can be joy in it, says O’Hara, with his patented casual, sad, loving, exuberant voice. A poem “For Grace, After a Party,” uses a romantic address to articulate a bond between friends, emphasizing the non-traditional bonds developed in O’Hara’s world: “You do not always know what I am feeling. / Last night in the warm spring air while I was / blazing my tirade against someone who doesn’t / interest me, it was for you that set me afire.” I think my poem “Marriage in a Downpour” works in a similar way, articulating a close friendship through typically romantic language.

I often feel a little lonely, and I think that reading has always been a way for me to feel less so. I think of authors as friends. I write about the intimacies surrounding me, because they are what I care about. I think that's why I can't ever stray too far from the lyric address. I love speaking to people. I love being spoken to. Even though the address in its Petrarchan form did such a good job of objectifying us (women) in the olden days, I can't deny it also has the elegance of a whisper and all the bells and whistles of the U.S. Postal

Service. My poems are not all addresses, nor are they all autobiographical; still, almost all of them include intimate speech between people, a searching for connection through language. “Poem Ending with a Line from ‘21 Love Poems’” explores the difficulty of achieving this connection, and how desire for this connection can be as essential as romantic desire.

Along with nodding to Rich, I look at a few other women writers and their legacy in the American canon including Harper Lee and Anne Sexton. The figure of Anne Sexton receives more focus in my collection, since her work has been a guilty pleasure of mine for quite a long while. I say guilty pleasure, because I internalized the misogynist literary establishment’s assessment of her verse as overly emotional and uneducated, and couldn’t allow myself to admit how much her work resonated with me. Sexton’s bio page on the Poetry Foundation’s website, for example, is dedicated to a discussion about whether or not she was any good. They cite a *Punch* magazine critic, among many others saying, “When her artistic control falters the recital of grief and misery becomes embarrassing.” Writing about her, I work through these ideas and the self-conscious suspicion that my writing is too emotional, not “smart” enough, too feminine, “embarrassing.” By focusing on one of the most taboo aspects of her personality - her suicidal impulse - I am trying to reclaim her as an influence and assert my own poetic agency. As is my way, I develop a kind of romantic friendship between myself and her in “Nightcap with Anne Sexton.”

...

My friend Gabriel lives with HIV, and studies suggest that green tea, dark chocolate and red wine will help him retain cognitive functions. I mailed him the chocolate late, but he did get it. In return, he sent me sauerkraut he made out of green mango. “Wing-Clip Summer” derives its emotional core from the summer we found out he had contracted

HIV. Many poems in this collection are in some ways about death and grieving, but they are not the poems of a person dealing with real, deep sorrow. Instead, it is a confused grief, an “inaccurate” grief for a friend who lives happily and healthily with HIV, for a poet long gone, a dead grandfather she’s never met, etc... The speaker of these poems lives in a house where death has come in through a hole in the screen door, but hasn’t yet bit: “your death a thing now /in the air and certaining.” My hope for these poems is that my readers find this house, where death buzzes in the air, filled also with a strange, beautiful kind of light.

I

You Never Know, Daytona Beach

for Ricky

It's because he is wild
that he takes his flip-flops off
and hands them to the drunk fists
on the boardwalk. Sand and slick wood.
I have no other term or convenient word.
White hats say *faggot*
and he begs them to take his shoes,
an air gust to topple a straw house.
Walks on.

He says he won't ever go back
to Daytona Beach, and I nod
but don't totally believe him.
Who knows where he'd go and for what.
Maybe a hot air balloon launch
to see the Atlantic's glitter
concentrated from above.

With nothing to assure him
about the meaning of the movement,
he has moved, he has moved quite a lot.
So have I. Sometimes, our leg strides sync up,
our heads cackling back.
And then come the questions
that carry us toward each other, further,
the way the moon pulls water
up and over toe-ringed toes
in shit towns like these.

Aubade Above Her

I forget I feel more beastly than I look,
that to the moisturized gentleman in seat 10C,
I am just a more disheveled version of his daughter.

I read Michael Ondaatje's *Secular Love*.
Mr. 10C, with the bright French blue button-down,
reads a book about systems and performance.
Lots of bullet points.

You, too? Oh, Mr. Golden Sun, fancy meeting you above Louisiana.
I bother the flight attendant for more water without ice.
Mr. 10C doesn't notice the bags of goldfish
stapled to my clothes. *Excuse me sir, they are my griefs unbroken.*
I unhinge my tray table carefully
so as not to disturb them and puncture a hole.

What's he doing now?
Opening up a work laptop, starting an email: *Good Morning, Alicia.*
(Odds are good he's telling her to do something.)

Oh Alicia, when you click
I switch on,
ten thousand feet up;
Alicia, you start me today.

Domestic

I have so many more cells
than the beetle on its back
on the kitchen counter.

My kind has invented things
called killing jars, insect pinning kits,
the phrase *snuff it out*.

I could flip the beetle after breakfast,
after dinner, or just call a relative
watching its legs bat around
by the toaster. Helpless.

The beetle's shell holds an impossible
amount of colors. But I can't see them.
I can't see the tongues of aliens
in books I haven't read either.

This is always happening –
me in the kitchen, in the house
on the street dead-ending
at a three-hundred-year-old oak in flames.

In Thailand She Said, *Please*

A lover took me to another world,
where her father was raised
the same place he died later from a dog bite (infected),
to say hello, raise a beer, not to mourn.

Where her father was raised,
in Thailand she said, *Please stop the car*
to say hello, pour a beer. Not to mourn,
she kept her shades on.

In Thailand she said, *Please*, stopped the car
where the white cemetery stones blared
she kept her shades on.
A place to visit him. We got out

where the white cemetery stones blared
in me, even after we left.
A place to visit him. We got out
at a roadside stand.

In me, even after we left –
the stacked pomelos, perfumed, luring.
At a roadside stand,
we joked with the merchants.

The stacked pomelos, perfumed, luring
us where he died later from a dog bite (infected).
Joking with the merchants, peeling them in one go,
we wore the peels on our heads like caps.

Friends Is Never Dreary

after Emily Dickinson

I'm digging a hole. I'm shoveling this poem.
Nobody – not me – knows a poem's hole.

Who would like to help? Text crusts
are a tough top soil.
You mark an X and pierce ground. There

are many tools, but I love a spade.
You press down with your foot like
nobody, angle it, bend your knees
too. Sweat. Tongue. Tooth.

Then all your selves dredge up. You choose where but
there's a whole for
a hole, always a
pair, a frog and a bog. In this poem
of quiet, of lonely, of friends – of
us?

Don't
tell people we're excavating it,
they'd say we are ruiners,
advertise against us or worse. *I'm holed up,*
you! I yelled. *But I*
know the truth, she twisted in her tube.

How we floated downriver, far from
dreary is a part of the story I'd like
to tell, if you'd
be
somebody available to hear it.

The Arrangement of Holes and Hills

*Why hold onto all that? And I said,
Where can I put it down?
She shifted to a question about airports.
– Anne Carson, “The Glass Essay”*

1

My fag friends sit around the bar
trying to figure out where Ben can take a “date”
on a layover in the Atlanta airport:

*The park across the street? What about the bathrooms?
Too well lit. Not the food court either. Wait!
The parking garage stairwell!*

After you create something, anything
in this world, then comes a problem: where to put it?

2

We all make holes; we all make hills.
But how do you find the absence to carve out in
the first place?

Just as you find a hopscotch court
on a bare sidewalk, a girlfriend
in an old roommate. Playing around. Wanting something.

3

Sometimes you’re caught with soil on the spade,
time called, all the spots taken.

I’m jealous of your easy way,
your clean corridor, your app,
your perfect hour between landing and take off,
the tidy gap between Tampa and New York.

Me, I’m the hag with bags
pacing by the conveyors. I’m still fun, aren’t I?

Now I Am Terrified at the Earth, It Is That Calm and Patient

I take a drive out to New Orleans East, past the Bunny Bread Factory,
down a gravel road to the back of a lumber mill,
to a chute funneling wood shavings into a dumpster.

From off the ground, I scoop loose shavings into plastic bags,
toss them into the pickup, and drive away,
holding one hand up to the worker outside.

Back at my garden, I layer four square feet of sawdust, two inches high,
between layers of table scraps: egg shells, carrot tops, apple cores;
whole and hard pears nobody bothered to wait for, spent lemon halves.

I shape the pile so it's rectangular, and add more,
until it reaches 4 feet. I water the pile, and let it sit for over a month.
When I return, I stick my hand into its center,

past the gray-maroon dead fruit, red ants, maggots
and flies trying to lay eggs in the remaining orange peels.
The center is hot-hot, the closest

I've come to the heat of death.
When it cools, I'll spread it on my soil. My plants will feed on it.

Poem Ending with a Line from “21 Love Poems”

I know that a pond holds more than bloated weights:
snapping turtles, dragon flies, frogs, for instance.
Water itself mutes you: I ask you to draw letters
with a twig in the silt, but your body inarticulates in waves.

Evening can't be forever stalled.
I look up from studying your face –
I love this drift
so long a lover to me
before you.
The white's a bluish gray.
One by one, the trees
stepping back into the forest,
sick of the prodding and interview.
So long a lover to me –
the grooves well worn,
I slip with a scant splash
back to her.
It must be that you love reaching
for that grip rope, that it has to feel desperate.
I don't need to talk every day.

Your silence today is a pond where drowned things live.

Marriage in a Downpour

In the life we lead together every paradise is lost.
- Robert Hass, "Against Botticelli"

Through intermittent water and glass, *stayed put*,
a long look at a long pine: who flinches first.
I look out the picture window, while Josh cooks beans
in our subtlet apartment above the barn.
I'm a wetted bonsai under surveillance,
surmising: we're *losing* it, this life
slipping more than slipped.

Our friend Christine straps herself
into an "upside down machine" whenever
she isn't feeling right. The body is a curfew,
but we are not rooted to the ground like trees.
If you built a wire fence flush up against my person
I would never grow cartilage around the wire.

The rain guilts us. Quietly we assume fault.
A faucet left on somewhere.
This apartment lets me rearrange words all day,
and Josh pounds his keyboard working on stories.
I watch the rain pour through the trees,
wondering, is he a terrarium person?

The dirty opal sky whirring above us, pauses.

How close can I get before I butt up against
the warm clear glass?

Look at me:
You are not in any painting.
I am not in any painting.

Head Landscaper at Holes and Hills Gardens

is about to claim her baggage.

She regards the two duffels
rounding toward her as if they had taken
a Florida vacation and she, their doting lover,

there to pick them up. Their motion is slow
motion; she imagines gripping their tan handles
and hoisting them off the belt,
before they actually reach her - the point

where her travels are through?
Stuffing her bags with beach sand
was an immature and inconvenient stance
to take, she realizes, approaching the conveyor.

Mango tree in the backyard.
Storm broken fronds on the drive.
A love like a humid pulse.

Maybe when she piles
the sand on her bathroom tiles,
it'll give off an authentic sea-side vibe.
Maybe the tiny glass will blow
through the house and with it,
Longing, coming to rest
as an epidermis of grit and gleam.

Ask Her

You say you what to be unbearable.
Do you even know what that is? Ask the ocean.
Compare your multitudes to the octopus and then
ask the ocean. I've got at least three hearts -
some sooted, some small. But legs? I can't tell.
With her hand up in me, I've got three at least.
She pushes me up against the doorframe. I stand it.
I stand it. The nauseous too much of it. Ask the ocean
about seasick. Ask her about the rain slicing
through her surface, and the glaciers melting into her,
more and more of her, as she takes it. She takes it all.

II

Nightcap with Anne Sexton

Magic talking to itself talking
to magic talking to itself:
Eat the olive. Let's go walking.
Another? Vodka off the shelf.

You're a sexy fucking lady,
but you are trashed as all get out.
With you, I want to play footsie.
At you, I would like to shout,

How hard is it really to stay alive?
In lieu, I tip back my feet and glass,
ask how Kurt Vonnegut came to write
you a preface, try not to make a pass.

Magic talking to itself talking
to magic talking to itself:
Eat the olive. Let's go walking.
Another? Vodka off the shelf.

Morphine

*Even so, it was hard for her to make the god open
his heavy eyes and understand what he was required to do.*
— Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*

In the house of absolute forgetting a deal was made.
No branches in breeze, no tongues chatting in breeze,
no dogs flipping metal bowls, no cockroaches rustling
through stalks of ginger, no ginger scent, no white clit
of ginger peeking, no pigeons, no oil spills, no bounce,
no NOPD, no bougainvillea. No soul, no brass,
no moonflowers and their one night only. No mouths to spit
watermelon seeds. No giants swinging chandeliers
over their shoulders. No dogs to flip bowls. No breeze.
No branches. No breeze. No bounce. No breeze. No brass.
In the house of absolute forgetting a deal was made.

People Are a Honey Bee Swarm

With all the coffee mugs facing the correct way on their pegs, he needed to leave.

Sometimes people are a honeybee swarm.

Forsaking the fixtures, the hum of well-oiled work and provisions – for what exactly?

I bet she saw him blurry as he told her, his golden skin vibrating multitudes, wearing,
warning a new violence.

You can't always keep the dog from running into the road.

He left and she dropped her fists into a soup pot of honey.

He left and she filled the bathtub with honey, encased herself.

How do we keep ourselves in the playpen?

How do we contain ourselves in love?

She took a bucket of honey and slopped it on the drive (making a mess for the next person).

The house stuck out a sticky tongue to the street.

Harper Lee: Ninth Hole, Second Novel

After a while, in Monroeville, Alabama,
when everybody including the press
wanted coffee and a spot on her couch,
she escaped to the golf course, the only place
they couldn't hound her, the only place
she could be all the characters as she laughed,
wrote dialogue aloud, whacked golf balls
toward those little flags.

It feels like building a house with matches.

It feels like foresting and lumbering logs into matchsticks,
then making a house out of those match sticks.
It feels hard is what.

According to Golf Digest, the odds of making a hole-in-one are 1 in 12,750.

The first one didn't come quick or easy either. *I'm more of a re-writer than a writer.* And once she threw a draft of *Mockingbird* out the window during winter, and had to run downstairs to collect her words before they were too wet and dirty to read.

The odds of making two holes-in-one in a single round are 9,222,500 to 1.

Her sister told a journalist, when she was almost finished with the second manuscript (supposedly *something about hunting a deer*) a burglar broke into her apartment and stole it.

Like she was covering for her.

Like she needed covering

for doing what no one could only once.

As if it were words and not the wildness behind them that we need.

Brother

We, the next of kin intensively caring,
huddled up to a neurologist - a sadist
maybe, or just a drama queen. He says,

*a snake of veins and arteries
in the brain of your brother is clenching
in its mouth an egg (a tumor) and it won't let go.*

A snake and egg.
What is this, Professional Life Saver Man,
an ancient myth? (If my brother ordered it up

from the diner down the highway from the hospital,
he'd have gotten two eggs. *If you order one here, you get two.*
Two gets you four. The waitress confidently makes a strange sense

at me, but I don't care as thick white plates of many many over-easy glide past me.)
Indiana Jones, the neurologist, can't think of another way to say
this is as insane as it feels.

So I imagine an egg inside my brother
and I crack quietly.

Bandage

My brother is a brown paper grocery bag
filled with meat, eggs, greens and cheese.
A woman carries him each day
across the busy intersection
under hot August, crummy half-storms,
evening skies (grey-purple or dead orange),
when the wires cranky-talk above her,
when traffic races down North Avenue
like a river after heavy rain,
when Chicago, still, says nothing
except *street lamp in low fog*.
He is a heavy parcel of perishables,
and yet she carries him every day,
gives a smug look to the jaunty white symbol
of a man walking, re-adjusts him on her hip,
grips his tough paper, and walks on.

Metamorphoses in Chicago

Halcyon Days: A period of calm during winter, when storms do not occur.

I am wearing a black coat (vintage), its fur collar popped.
Too much, Meg, my Mom shakes her head and smiles.
A Christmas thing to do: theater as a family.
We sip bottled water in the foyer
and watch the crowd. Pearls and Perms.
My brother asks if I'll go with him at six the next morning
to his radiologist appointment in the suburbs.
I decline in front of everyone, glaring behind my rabbit.

Ushers move us to our first row seats
and give us towels. (The set a shallow pool of water,
actors could splash us.) A purple glow shot
from the rafters. Tucked in and ready.
Why don't we gather around pools more,
for meetings and dinner parties?
It feels natural after a while.

On the drive home down Lake Shore
my mother and I yell to match the winter wind.
Nearly healthy now. Nearly.

Alcyone Evaluates Her “Self-Destructive” Tendencies

Toss me a Mountain Dew (palm to forehead),
she said, *and let's die on a glory crest,*
if you insist, let's at least die together.

Toss me a Mountain Dew.
She has time now to examine the last words
she spoke to him — sarcasm and desperation
working in tandem.
He said, *Your father will drive me*
against the lips of reeds. She put a finger to hers. *Shhh.*
He'll do much worse.

Megan Evaluates Her Reading Comprehension

I can't find the fact of her wanting to die anywhere. Not in my high school copy of Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, not in my translation of *Metamorphoses*. David Raeburn says that Ovid says Alcyone “leapt on the groyne,” and then she flew. Why then, does her suicide feel so inevitable? (A Google search of Alcyone + Cyex + suicide shows I am not the only one.) It's like I've been holding her head under water. Anne Sexton spoke of furniture placed in the sun; *I have nothing against life*, she says like a bored teenager. I find it, as they say, *indulgent*, but I still want to be that bored teenager's boyfriend. I want to make her mix-tapes, stand outside her window, all that (*indulgent*). I want thoughts of me to shake the pill bottle in her hands so she fumbles, at least, with the cap.

When We Are Birds

We won't have these parties, we won't have these parties,
when we are birds

Black-Eyed Susan

A parking lot is a kind of harbor,
this one newly asphalted
and criss-crossed with white paint.
From under a mulberry tree she watches the gulls
eat from a bag of Doritos, and she rues the rigidity of love.
Before she could have lumbered to another life entire.
It's like the gears have been locked in one position
and she is the harbormaster to his idiotic boat.
And lucky for Walmart's policy
and lucky for love, she supposes. It holds her to the earth.
Otherwise, she might hiccup into a cloud
and draw a rather dark image with her particles.

...

How to ready yourself for news like that?
You sleep. She stepped into the forgotten pasture
behind the Walmart and laid into the ground
with her shovel. Less like digging, more like prying.
Wild flowers brushed her ankles
as she worked and sweated, and just as dusk set itself
upon the scene with a noticeable thud of silver
she found a seat in the earth she'd made
among the roots and rooms
and deigned herself a worthy eye to its socket.
She blinked twice, a cloud of dust lifting around her,
and then she shut.

III

What Counts as a Proper Goodbye?

First, into your hand, I'll put something
small – a river stone in the shape
of our state, an old key (not quite skeleton),
a coin with some kind of need pressed into it
by a vending machine lever. Second, I'll mention
I was alone strolling a beach or boulevard
thinking of you when I came across it.
Is it clear we can't just fuck each other and laugh
till we're dead? Please hold out your hand.
Bask in this accrual with me. This swelling of objects.
My mother says, when you have kids and a job
and you're going to school, you just have to
keep everything moving. Thirdly, I propose
we practice dying in a workshop setting.
I'm hazy on the order of things.
If all memories were trinket-able, then
maybe life would feel less like watching
a shadow-squid vibrate on the living room wall.
Let's make a sculpture in the backyard
dedicated to every second I've spent without you.
But remember our dying, and break to practice regularly.
We can weld rusty mufflers and wheels into pelicans
like aging hippies, adorn the birds with our momentos.
Fourthly, I'll invent new and impossible ways to stretch
this love out like a ham. Please hold out your goddamn hand.

Nocturne

Outside I'll toss a hard black puck:

 night song minus vowels. A consonant
hoot, hit out. I can jerk off alone
but I cannot shout if I have no body
no board against which to sound –
a gif of a horsewhip at midnight
lashing out. A lover is another –

Don't you know that by now?

Outside the vowels like owls free and full of air.

Wing-Clip Summer

You called up the Lord, but you got a Checker Cab
to strike you down, flit skulk bird.
Wind-turned Gabriel Difazio-shield.
Shard cradled. Back-tailored. Memory foam.

Diagnosis: mortal, other acronyms.
The Lord-slash-Check Cab called
to strike you down.
Blue feather gleam: right light.
Wrong light: matte black absorbs the mess of it.

You make no sense.
You make no sense — gorgeous,
living off dumpster-ed pizza,
never filling out a single form.

The windshield caught your flung body
in Manhattan like an infield mitt. Lucky son
of a bitch—nobody called you that
summer, your death a thing now
in the air and certaining.

A Pair for My Trek

1

All out of dining and wine-ing, I return
our play pieces to the box,
the loaner bike back across town. The journey
just as wild as all of it. Riding one, clutching
the other brat's neck. It bucks me
like memory moving, splits off,
and glides over shattered steps.

You left. And now I'm ghost riding.
You said goodbye to us,
the whiskey, the shook and chipped pavement,
the sweet air —
just for me now. I pedal along and turn
from one riding two bikes
to a lone and four-wheeled bleeder.

Slow leak, a study: do revolutions
accumulated bring increase or slump?
I am sick of menstruation.
I'm a squeezebox over-squeezed, a lump
and riding on wheels equally pricked.

We leak bike, we leak. I loop in city,
over glass bits, through months and then get bit.
Emptying, a whirled wheeze.

Maybe the pedal pump can't be mustered
(concrete hooves). *Girl you need a ride?*
I've birthed only travel, so if I'm stuck on this flat
like an Anemic Leakasaurus, who am I?

A fine thing - riding on air,
another faulty miracle.

The Inaccuracies of Grief: HIV, 2007

It's raining here, water, water
and you, dear, are likely in the ocean.

The cap slimes off the expensive balsamic.
I cook dinner and you're in the ocean.

Sunflowers increase their hunch
toward ground, you're in the ocean.

You'd soggy a clipboard, you'd souse a name
tag – you're dripping with ocean.

HOPWA apartment on Far Rockaway
overlooking the ocean.

It's not 1985, we won't sprinkle you
sobbing into the ocean.

My grief is water in a Ziploc baggie
that never once breaks
at the thought of you.

A blue pickup hunts for scrap, grumbles
down a side street; you're swimming.

I can't stand in the middle of this.
You can't stand any of this.

Snorkel and fin. Dark-eyed beauty.

The Story

The Glory of Morning Extends Itself Indefinitely into Debbie.

The Morning Glory Story: Chapter 1, page 3.

Debbie Glories in the Extended Morning, Drinking Her Coffee.

There's Death in Here Somewhere, She Says to Her Cup, to Nobody.

Bird Clamor Rattles Up Vines, Clangs the White-Hearted Bell Inside of Every Morning
Glory.

Every Rattle Another Opening; This Morning Is Mooring Slowly.

You and Me, Kiddo, She Says to the Stairwell, to Nobody. Every Rattle Another Opening.

She Licks No Pointer Finger to Turn No Page-Turner. Instead,

Debbie Makes a Grab for the White-Hearted Bell.

I Am Not A Man

I met the actor
Rip Torn's daughter
the other day (*Men in Black* -
I actually couldn't
think of his face but)
she says he's old and failing,
but he used to be young
(imagine!) I could see
she didn't want to tell
the story (it doesn't portray
him well), but everybody
will tell the story if you act
interested. She said once
when he was 80 years-old
he had her film a video
of him digging a hole
in the backyard. Twenty minutes
of the old man sweating it out
on the lawn, making a dark
spot in a plane of green.
I am not a man and
I am not an old man
so it's unfair of me to say
how has he lived here
eighty years, thinking he can
dig his life back out of the ground?

Grown

Chicago 2010

Making room in my mother's trunk
for flats of pansies, hyacinth and tulips,
we push aside a cardboard box containing the remains
of her categorically no good father.
We laugh and irreverence isn't the word, neither is grief.

We talk like Chicagoans, we talk weather:
yesterday thirty degrees, now Spring. Just like that.
This city, a prairie blanched for rails and hogs,
with a history brief enough to write on one hand.

We keep driving down Lake Shore past Belmont Harbor,
with ashes and flowers shuffling in the trunk.
I never asked: how did he hurt you?
And today, why he even gets to hitch in the back.
Maybe it's enough, just that that we've got
more flowers than father now.

Domestic

Here, everybody goes to Home Depot and bars in equal proportion. I ran into a friend in the paint department. She said, *I need it light, clean and lead free.* (wink-wink) We laughed, sitting on the display case, kicking our legs, while a machine jostled color in cans. An older black man approached me later in the fixtures aisle. *You're not from around here, are you?* And he was right and happy to be right. *Around here we know our white people, yes indeed.* I had no idea what he meant. Not a new experience. All these doorknobs lined up, bright and gleaming like my Irish face after one too many, and I turn not a one, can't.

Flirting

“I transferred out to Scottsdale in the early nineties,” said the woman who used to call herself the Human Trampoline. “Then I moved to Eugene after my partner died. Bought a breakfast place downtown. We do pretty good. It's a living.” I couldn't tell, maybe she was flirting with me. On her elasticity: “I've been all kinds of things – a ball pit, a broken bird house, an ashtray, an heirloom tomato, a chewing gum wad of crows – but nothing as famous as a trampoline. Still one from time to time. Might not be something you ever really turn *out* of.” I could relate, after many years of feeling like a dried out pudding top. Raise your glass to the lacks so heavy and large they lift you, they spring you! The wind spit a chunk of glass out my chest. Her leg did brush up against mine, briefly.

The Dig

The Aftercare kids at the back cafeteria tables sign their name on a sheet and a woman hands them a bag of Doritos. This is all they can say

happens in Aftercare, so I let them help me, when I can, outside where plastic hair ties clack, and bright garbage blooms

next to my kale and potatoes. Most people don't necessarily see mine as a real job. I need help harvesting oak leaves to mulch the garden beds.

"Mulch shades out weeds, holds moisture," I say as the Garden Teacher to these 9 and 10-year-olds. "Thank you, take this shovel."

Slowly they hoist the brown matter into the wheelbarrow, about half the spade head's worth falling back to the ground each time.

But our operation continues; and they are doing *something* though not yet grown. "I'll be right back," I say to them.

And returning three minutes later, the school side yard now the moon where craters the circumference of basketballs dapple the ground.

Digging always more interesting than leaves than soil than air. I am moving between the small and dirty palms, exclaiming about what's been found.

for Ida

I came when the hay
spread like a golden coat
over the field. Yellow
finches and sparrows
did the ol' dip and swoop
for seeds. A hundred birds
in the sky low enough
to touch. Exquisite—right there,
your Tennessee.

Exquisite—the creek
and our queer bodies
wading. I was still there
when the ten-wheeled star rake
flipped the glints first to splashes
then to windrows, straight
and steady on the field.

But I left before the baler
pressed the long columns
into tight and white plastic cylinders,
which you would eventually stop noticing
from the ease of your kitchen window
sometime before Halloween, my dear.

Vita

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