

Still, No Grace

A. Prevett

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Still, No Grace

There is only one arc: suffering, transformation.

—Alison Benis White

All the Trees of the Field Will Clap Their Hands

I want to be remembered like this: taut, defeated
by my own eagerness. A crude emerald whorl.

In green tandem, we twirl, sisters
to some bright, unknown sound.

Through the grove of voices, we tumble light,
feathery. A trail of down in our wake, haphazard,

meaningless. A primal scene, this dance.
We step and twist as if to rearrange

something fundamental, as if we'll come out of this
somehow better: prettier, more charitable. We dance

like deer shedding antlers against oak, a scorpion
parting itself from now-old skin. Dance ache

and blood, fury and feral. Slough off
every modern notion. Still, there is no end

in which we achieve what we want.

thicket

what does it take we clean the body and clean the body but no reward emerges from
the fresh thicket honeysuckle torn down clusters of violence ripped up discarded what
do i learn this flesh is not a garden this flesh antisacred the blooms i know they are
antisacred i know i am a canyon carved through filth what gift has such knowledge
to afford a [] like me no stellar engine ready to take us elsewhere no generous
apricot tree no linen dress drying on a line nude hungry i approach the gate rootless
knowledge [] still i am
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Coruscate

Today, I become a being of pure dignity.

How
to celebrate.

I say girl and not
a single eyebrow raises.

Inside their shells, each
yolk hardens at once.

The sky
reaches down a gray finger.

I kiss it.

From my womb, a new name
is born.

It's meaning:
to pulse with hot beams.

Then another.

And another name.

They sound
as they hit the floor
like lemons.

Another name.

Another name.

The thunk of them.
The thunk.

Sunny and pocked and promising.

Another name.

Another name.

Gray sky.

Another name.

How long
will this go on.

Another name.

Another name.

What, gray sky.

Another name.

What to do about this bruising.

Another name.

Another name.

Which of these.

Another name.

Which of these belongs to me.

I Dreamt I Dreamt I Was Thousands Thousands

Mine is an unfortunate motherhood.
Mother to too-square toenails.
Mother of body hair. Mother
to hatred of my body
hair.

Stinking Viscera Mother.
Hot Agony Mother.
Mother to so many tiny robots
repairing my singular robotmother
body.
Robotmother etherized
upon a gendered table.

Dear mothermending daughters: Tonight
I dreamt that we were no single thing.
That we had not been whittled to a fierce
lonesome point.
On the warm slab of the table
we were many lawless
as silk Mothers only to twirl
to rain and redgrace

To so many figs and just enough jaws
for each to sleep in.

In no corner of we did there live
the grotesque root
of grief.

To have remained a girltarget
draped in the uniform
of an opposing army—this was beyond
we mothers, we plague fragments.

Gender as Riddle with No Solution

I am scented as a clementine and have no breasts.
In my hand I hold the opposite of an umbrella.
Sometimes I rattle when kissed. Other times
I fold myself again and again
just so I may watch paper flush with jealousy.

In my heart is a house with walls of wet muscle.
On the walls hang pictures of houses in fields
and only houses in fields. And over the fields are suns
the color of clementine and with sunglasses and isn't that funny.
In the rooms of the house live the bodies I would place the
house in
if I could pick up the house and move it somewhere else.

Really my skin is clementinish, which explains the scent.
If you saw a clementine from a distance
you may not know what to do with me. If you tried to fold me
it would be difficult and messy. You would probably want
to give up. At the supermarket, the stationery section laughs
as I walk by.

I am the furthest thing from fruit.
I am the centerpiece of a wake of vultures.
I am the god of worms, and Jesus,

do they love clementine.

Actually, I am the vanity mirror
with a bird pecking at its reflection in it.
I'm the bird, too. I am water and oil
and I cannot say when I am which.
I refuse to.

I am the entire lingerie section
with caution tape wrapped around it,
and you cannot spell lingerie
without clementine.

All of these things are in the house, which you'll
remember
is my heart, which you'll trust is the shape of a letter
folded thrice then ripped up, the pieces flushed
clementinely
down the toilet.

Poem in Which it is Clear I Am No Longer the Crude Gourd

Nor anything lacking a red-raven mouth

Nor the armoire home to fat wasps

humming among glacier lace

Nor the piano rolled into a tight ball then kicked down the
stairs

Nor

that simple creature
made of wrists and
funnybones and
dashes of spite
Nor

the moonwater lake with fishshaped penises
Nor

old thread with grapespeckled eggs along its length
Nor

root vegetable peeking cautiously into the harsh blue world

Nor creature too fearful to splinter

its clavicles against the straps
of a dress Nor

the thing gnawing frantic its least favorite arm
Nor the least favorite arm

Nor the broad antlers peeled to their brute
centers
Nor your private lesson

in progression in fleshy mantles

Nor the shadow
in search of a shape Nor

gust of light

Nor gust of

anything Skin shadow of anything
Nor rhododendron
Nor bound

Nor begonia

Nor rust

Failed Sonnet

I am jealous of the smoothness of worthy machinery,
the spinning of a thing placed on the hub of a wheel—a spike, a head.

I crave a body made of tough stuff. Steel, ceramic.
Fresh pyrite. And the break of a plow

through the dry earth of me. Unzipped, then laced
with tulip seeds. Covered again in good, good dirt.

Nothing feral: all intentioned, all uniform.
A mechanism of utilitarian purpose.

Each tulip a clasp of my hands.
All of my hands sprouting at once.

The hands in pinkclemerine union.
The hands taking their own names.

Personality Quiz: What Kind of Trans Bird Are You?

Have you ever questioned your gender?

Do you feel uncomfortable being referred to by pronouns?

Which kind of bird is your favorite?

Were you frightened by the beginnings of puberty?

Do you have a favorite color? Is it divisible by three?

Let's try that again:

When did you start questioning your gender?

If there were no limits, how many bird feeders would you own?

Do you have a strong dislike for the secondary sex characteristics assigned to you?

Where beneath your skin does your shame turn to rest?

Acceptable responses: *The gut. The hollow tops of the feet. The liver's dark pit.*

Do you feel at odds with your chest? Do you feel as if something is missing (perhaps a sunset,

or tender plumage)? Or is there too much brightness? Would you describe it as an overabundance?

How often do you question your gender in the presence of robins? Of pigeons? Grackles?

Have you ever seriously considered or desired surgical intervention?

Complete the analogy. Gender is to Prison as Gender is to ____.

Acceptable responses: *Anarchy. Sludge. Hot Air Balloon. Hot Air Balloon. Hot Air—*

How often does your dysphoria complicate your sex life?

If you're sure you're not a bird,
then why are you taking this quiz?

Is it really surgery if something is added to your body? If you lose nothing but the fright?

Can you identify your gender on a map? On a scale of 1 to 10?

Acceptable responses: *Somewhere between "Pistachio"*

and “*Wind chime.*”

When do you feel most euphoric?

To ensure you're not a robot, please identify the choice that doesn't belong in this group:

Extremity Appendage Meat Blade Blood
Feather

When you observe the robins outside your kitchen window, do you notice their bellies?

If yes: Are you like me? Do you feel they look like bruised tangerines sulking in a dark corner of the house? Are you?
If no:

When you stretch your arms over your head to take a deep breath in, what do you feel?
Select the option that feels most accurate.

Like an incomplete machine An urge to gather
twigs Like my wings are pairs over pairs
of gardening shears

Correct the misspelling of the following word: “Transness”

Acceptable responses: *Grandness*

Unacceptable responses: *Tameness*, ERROR: FIELD
UNSPECIFIED, *Sadness*

Do you feel euphoric yet?

Please enter your email below.

To receive your results, please first identify from this
lineup
the animal that wrought your gruntgray body.

Acceptable responses: *Okay. Yes. There.*

*Unacceptable responses: Is it this baby mole? This
dead fish?*

I would love to, but

I forgot my coat, and my heart

is a terrible

heatsink.

I'm sorry. I have no body.

Please tell me what I may search for instead.

huskless

a bird molting catastrophic is good a bird fighting its reflection is good even the way a bird bathes is good a form of testament something telling us magnetically bear witness bear witness it should be a shame that i must even ask that you bear witness to this [] huskless and demanding as a brand new chickadee who else but you deerborn one to document this process to give us our daily ovary to scar it to bits o recorder of my history o sand in my womb am i not like all the other []s made to fog the mirror into pieces tongue up all the shards swallow them back together am i so unfit to perform even i can cause a blooming in the dark who but you to deem me worthy of sharing your title if not you husked and private witness then who then who

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Still Life without Wind or Amoeba

It's noon on a Thursday and my blood is trampolining.
That's not true.

It's eleven at night on a Saturday.

I've just opened a beer, squeezed some lime into it.

Already now it's three-thirty on a Tuesday.

Nothing feels as urgent as it ought.

Not the candle on the edge of the sill. Not
the rapidly melting polar glaciers.

Not reasonable gun control. Even my body lies dormant
as an arctic ground squirrel. Heart thumping
twelve times per day. Core temperature
three degrees below freezing.

It's not that I want to give birth, just that I wish
I'd been given the tools for it.

Your wish is more afraid of you
than you are. An arctic squirrel—
its heart doesn't beat like that.

Or it could. But I'm no biologist.

I can't even touch my toes
if I reach for them from a seated position,
legs huddled together, everything flat on the floor.
Your wish—the wind, maybe. What I would give
for an iota of quiet. An amoeba of quite.

If I could create spells, mine would go
Bam Bam Begonia
and then everything would be so hush.
Especially my womb because it does not exist.
Here is a real truth: centipedes
make excellent mothers. They take meticulous care
of their eggs, stay with the hatchlings for days
after birth. Even a centipede can mother.
Even a centipede. How could I
ever expect to be a home for anyone,
be any fertile ground for something good?
I'd stay with my silence
for days after birth.

Against Emptiness

I was outside and far away.
Full of secret dust. A whole country
in my mouth. A lavender world.

My back against the pine trunk,
I smoothed the cold sleek
of my new, bare thighs.
Marrowful. Sinewless.

I felt inside myself in the total sense.
Felt I would never again own
a shadow.

I knew I had not died.

Somewhere, thunder rumbled soft
as cardinal's breath. As something
heart-having.

I walked toward it
on polished antlers. Walked
though I lacked muscle.
Though I lacked.

**To the Cis Woman Who, after Complimenting C's Nails,
Turns to Me and *Says Sorry, It's a Girl Thing***

Like you, I owe my existence
to a single, carnivorous cell.

Like you, the sun moves over me like a hand
and like you that makes me feel something.

Yes, I was born
in the backseat of my flesh, knowing everything
I would ever need.

This is not to say I understand.

Every day, I wake inside a house of mirrors, a reflecting pageant
of familiar things: all of them recognizable, but none quite
myself.

Sometimes my face is prettier. Smooth and angled as a harp.
Sometimes I'm at the beach, sunburnt in my egg blue dress.

Sometimes I am teaching a dandelion
how to make fragments out of fragments.

Maybe one morning, if I'm truly lucky, I'll stir, find myself
armorless as you, desirable

as a geode.

Or maybe I'll wake upright, floating in seawater.
My dress like a jellyfish's bulb: billowing,
reaching down.

Feral

after Anne Sexton's "Yellow"

When I finally feel safety
again I'll work it around in my mouth
until it's all balled up, I'll spit it out, I'll
bury it shallow in a loamy field. I'll plant a shield
of sunflowers around it, I'll encircle them with apricot
pits, I'll pluck every downy feather in sight,
I'll write a poem called *Feral* and wrap
it around the naked animal I live in to plume it
well again, I'll give myself so many names and
everyone will be jumping at the chance to say
them, and the planet will be cooler and it will offer
enough for all of us and there will be no such thing
as inevitable doom and we will never remember,
not a single unzipped thing, we'll be always prim
and full and unwilted, won't we won't we won't
we won't we won't we won't we won't

ripejawceremony

You won't need a perfect moment, won't need
any home-grown, compost-fed, off-the-grid
kind of time. You will need only
a tight bundle of acorns, a few
hushed sighs. Your nails
can be any color: puke green,
creature blue. On your doorstep there
should be either a dog or a neglected houseplant.
There's no need to identify which.
Your name should be the name you would give to an alien
if you were the first person it met. Your name should be
chosen, held up to the light, scrutinized. Actually,
your nails should be the pinkest pink you can find.
One that doesn't occur in the natural world.
Pinkies and toes, too. Coat all their knobby
digitness in it. Use the excess to mark
the places on your jaw which dissatisfy
you most. Pretend that that curved thing
is your life. Once dry, take everything—your acorn bundle,
your chosen name, all your bones and lacquer—
take it all outside.
Step over the neglected doghouse
(otherwise it won't count).
Stand in the wet grass with everything you've gathered.
Wrap your toes around the necks
of many, many blades.

Now thrash.
Thrash in the rain.
Thrash like no one were
waiting. Like your jaw
depended on it.

Have I Asked for All That Much?

Seasons. Pebble breasts. A soft mind
and a soft mind. Yolk orange lipstick.
For all that I labor towards to be delivered
in a tight bow. No dizziness. A soft pebble
the color of tooth. Yolk
orange lips. A body seasoned
with just a bit more estrogen.
To be strung by my lips
as one would a bow. Become
both the string and the notch. The seed
and the light. A stomach with no fear in it.
To be loveable as a field is loveable.
I mean filled with tall grass and bees
ambling. To be the mother of a pinkorange mind.
Seasons and seasons. To teach the deer how
to pebble their wishes. To labor the love of it.
A mind in the stomach filled with estrogen
pebbles. To dizzy my way into belonging.
Be toothy as an eyelash in labor. Wake each day, orange
in palm. To swallow my field, dizzy with stomachs. No
seasons. A single brown swatch. To look like I even know
what my teeth wish for. Maybe an orange grove
breasted in estrogen light.

Trans Desire and You

1. (Choose all that apply): When you dream about me—the whole of my pink weight, its lonelemongrove legs—what am I wearing?

- [a] Suit of aphid nymphs
- [b] Black one-piece w/ peplum
- [c] Something unfit for polite company
- [d] Hiking gear

2. (Open-response: fifty-word max): How limp would each choice from question #1 be on these shoulders, how unbecoming of this sourskin?

3. (Open-response): If it is June 8th, and the sun sets at 9:30 pm, and you have been thinking of me for thirty-eight minutes and eleven seconds—at what angle do you picture my head tilting?

4. (Choose all that apply): What do I really need?

- [a] a skirt of bruised knuckles
- [b] a spider-silk crop-top
- [c] something to leave to the imagination
- [d] anything to make you wring your hands in anticipation of this gulching body

5. (Choose all that apply): What saddens me the most?

[a] Having only two hands to cover all this want.

[b] Option A

[c] Option A

6. (Tell me): In the scenario in question #3, where do your eyes linger longest?

7. (Tell me): How welcoming seems the cold ocean when seen through the stained glass of me?

“But beauty wasn’t enough.” – Gretchen Marquette

nurturing as a kestrel checking your sheets for mice i am a [] designed because i was designed
it follows i was crafted with intention because i possess the acrid sin of intent i am barred
forever from the vault of essentialism because i have no access to the vault i can never achieve
your biological legitimacy because spring will arrive i will not despair over illegitimacy nor will
i aspire to beauty any longer because i refuse to aspire the vault will forget any inklings of guilt
it possessed because the vault holds itself blameless as a weapon we [] designed will proliferate
run rampant like mares through fenceless pasture because more [] will design themselves from
the playplace of femurs and ribs which carries them there will be an increase in the general stock
of agony because to design oneself is an agony because to design oneself is agony each summer
i will wilt under my own weight because to design is agony fall will drape itself around my neck
like a scarf of blood feathers because design is agony spring will walk backwards into me as one
would into a hill of snow

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would into a hill of snow

[There's nectar everywhere. You can't stop me]

There's nectar everywhere. You can't stop me
from mourning, from unwanting the amber spill.
I'm peonies and tulips, sad nudes
and sea mud. I share blood with this blood.
I birth and birth my faces. Each one a new
papier-mâché mask over the old, the next always more
bloated than the last. The pain never stops, only chases
its recursive tail. I invite you to notice
our dripping marriage, the twin brides of my self
and its body. Each avowed to their mechanisms
in a ceremony of no song nor syllable. Only nectar,
flowing from cup to cup. All the cups thrown to the ground
in a crash. Their shattered glaze too perfect in this scum-
honey ritual: the big problem of being
a giving thing. When the final stage begins, it will appear
springlike: every present creature drinking
from my mouths, slurping my oyster tongues.
I will not know their names.

Through what other act might I understand love.

Maybe a Wandering Fair

Or some sort of tittering static—a transmutation.
That is what it was like: seed to bell pepper. Coal
to coastal flooding. Nothing lost or gained.
Only turning and turning. The first time I said I was
trans, I felt the world tilt barely, as if it had just set one foot
off the curb. I thought I might be asked
What was that? As in Sorry,
I was just doing the dishes. We were watching
that plane go by. I was thinking about mother's weather.
Like my clothes had gone honey and dripped away slow as death.
That's how it felt.
I could have counted every blood cell in my body.
It's pageantry—this being. Reticent
but thrumming. A ball-gown in full flare,
a perfect spinning O. No. A frog's first breath
after giving up its tail, a bird the moment it decides to take
off. Purposeful. The first time—It was like that.
It was not like that.

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Though originally a biblical reference, the poem “All of the Trees of the Field Will Clap Their Hands” borrows its name instead from the Sufjan Stevens song of the same name, off the album *Seven Swans* (2004).

“But beauty wasn’t enough” is a line from Gretchen Marquette’s poem “Song for the Festival,” which appears in her collection *May Day*, published by Graywolf Press (2016). The line in “rampant” which reads “because spring will arrive i will not despair over illegitimacy” borrows from the ultimate lines of Marquette’s poem, which read “Spring has arrived./ Let me not despair.” Many thanks are owed to all of the people who helped shape this

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