

## **My Many Sisters**

You know if you  
Close your eyes  
And think hard enough  
(Brain crunching like dead leaves)  
You could make that book  
Yeah, the heavy one,  
Fly off the shelf  
Or knock that bowl of  
Green bananas onto the floor  
And shatter that cobalt-blue ceramic.  
That flawed logic  
Of whispering friends  
Is tempting but dangerous.  
No, no,  
I want to say to  
Marie with the long legs,  
The full lips,  
The woman's voice,  
Who bled – nay, did everything – more  
Ardently than I  
She's got it wrong  
Backwards even  
It's by wanting things  
That they escape you  
The wires in brains and eyeballs,  
Sensing your desire, flee.  
The meaning behind every touch of skin  
Goes wasted  
It's better to drive them away yourself  
With anger and  
Poorly hidden blood-soaked washcloths.  
Who knew it could make things  
So crisp  
I guess I kind of imagined  
It being wet forever  
Like it is on the inside.  
That's what we wanted anyway,  
Isn't it?  
What I wanted was to  
Hold your neck in my hands  
And press my fingers into the soft skin  
At the bottom of the skull  
Where the human part is.  
But you were busy kissing boys  
And hating the very sight  
Of your mother's chipped hairbrush.  
What was I doing?  
Floundering yet?  
Yearning to rip your tarot cards

And literary dreams  
In half  
And call it bullshit  
Just to hurt you  
But when you shattered that  
Stolen science beaker on the bathroom counter  
And placed that glass shard  
In my hand  
It felt like deliverance,  
Love even  
In the absence of it  
Was that God?  
I'm sure watching my graceless fall  
Made yours seem kind of holy  
But you never even said those sorts of words  
The ones you kept for me  
Were softer  
Accompanied by sardonic grins  
They called it misbehavior  
But I called it everything else  
Soul extension  
Energy dispersal  
Coalition building  
To gag the thoughts  
The hateful ones  
With something so self-aware  
So goddamn beautiful  
It made me want to  
Enter a vacuum with you  
I thought you were meant for greatness  
While I,  
I would squirm with disease  
Forever.  
But now, look  
At how the tables have turned  
Into something altogether different  
See how quiet we've become,  
Trying to preserve blood  
Not spill it  
Although I still miss yours.  
If I think hard enough  
(Vessels pulsing like concert speakers)  
Can I take it back  
Into my body?  
Survival didn't make it  
– You, your adulthood –  
Any lighter  
Or easier to forget.

## The Meaning of Organs

No fire burns forever,  
She says as she folds cloth napkins  
Gingerly places them in the splintering cabinet  
One on top of the other  
Corners perfectly aligned.  
There's a comfort in sameness and softness  
– For some –  
But I can't imagine she's ever known  
The searing touch of the flame,  
Or the forceful blue heat within  
That mars and consumes, unremitting.

She squeezes a sudsy sponge  
Into a spotless water-filled tub  
And argues that  
The fire clears out space for newer, other things,  
And the smoke doesn't really hurt your lungs,  
Only fear does.  
But what does she know about fear?  
Has she ever looked on the fury,  
And stared into the flaming pit?  
Wasn't it her – or someone like that – saying  
Don't look directly at the sun,  
Look at the clouds instead.  
But the rays' reflections there are just as bright,  
And who but I can decide  
When or where or how  
I will come to blindness?

She says that it's the heat inside that I have to worry about  
Not putting out fires for others,  
But what is too cold is frozen,  
And what is frozen doesn't move,  
But lies still,  
Just cracks and shatters under  
The slightest pressure.  
But there again,  
I'm talking too fast,  
And she's only half listening,  
Putting socks into little inside-out balls  
And fastening the damp ones onto a taut line  
With wooden clothespins  
The kind that don't hurt if they pinch you.  
I want to rip them all off and bury them.  
Simply fuming,  
Steam coming out of my ears  
Like a cartoon,  
But the lines are too blurry and hard to make out  
It's more like dirty pond water

Than the kind she uses to hand wash her bras  
In nude or white only.

She's a good woman,  
The kind who cooks pasta sauce with no chunks  
And pleases everyone but herself.  
But I, I am all soot and ash,  
Or at least mostly,  
And I can't see past my own choking.  
The smoke I breathe out  
– I used to think of myself as a dragon, glorious but feared –  
Reminds her of Hell  
Which she only believes in a little bit  
And she is nothing if not devout in her half-beliefs.  
Her faith is inspiring, but contrived.  
Whereas I, I can't believe in anything  
That doesn't destroy things.  
Blackened tree stumps and dead soil,  
That's where my prayers go.  
What is already whole can't possibly need help  
Or be interesting.  
She says that all these burns on my body,  
Are scary and menacing,  
Her eyes dripping, damp, and see-through.  
No, give me fire over that  
Over beloved shiny sewing machines  
The acrid smell of cleaning supplies  
The holiness of motherhood and pretty hair.  
I'd rather be singed and smelly  
Than melt.

## Years Apart

Dear brother,  
Please don't hate what I've become  
Quiet and angry and somewhat confused  
About where our paths diverged.  
(Did we ever hike together?)  
Did the words stop when someone said "blood addiction,"  
Or did they ever flow freely at all?

They told both of us to  
Cut the long hairs from our foreheads.  
It scared me, but suited you  
Just the way your old Indians baseball cap did.  
The other kids laughed, but you didn't.  
And I never did.

Will you just sit with me here  
Once more  
On this rough pillowed sofa  
Where tears were shed in prolific outpourings  
Where we first learned that those teenage mutants were real  
And living inside our bones?  
We realized the distance as we slept parallel  
And in different dimensions  
In a bunk bed with metal pipes  
That you let me choose  
Red – the only thing I remember from then.

But the reality we share  
Doesn't seem to thin the folds of hesitation in the air.  
Did we collect fallen branches and windblown twigs  
And weep over lost Lego pieces  
Because we sensed the wavering fabric of our  
Pillowcases as we slept?  
The crumbling edges of the chocolate brown siding of our home?

I spent my childhood being mistaken for you,  
And I wished it were true,  
But all I was doing was guessing  
And beaming inside when you beat me at anything  
The games I threw myself into  
Just to be closer to you,  
Hear the throbbing,  
Try to hold onto the only steady hand I knew.

Oh, but mine shook so hard that  
I couldn't hold onto anything  
My fingers trembled  
With the force of the betrayals  
That you smiled and grew silent under.

No wonder your leaving  
Left me selfless and  
Achingly female.  
And you didn't come back,  
No, not ever,  
Even when I screamed for you  
And kissed your friends hard on the mouth  
And sent little paper sailboats with secret messages  
On the red, red rivers I made in the night.  
Did they make it to you  
Through the drunken haze?  
Or get dragged into ditches of unconsciousness and uncaring?  
Is that really the last place we visited together?

## **Just...**

Barn roofs are burning out in the distance,  
Can you see them?  
Set aflame by the nameless malice that gives your principles a body,  
A visible outline to live in.  
There, across the fields of wheat, corn, something wholesome and good,  
They light up the night sky  
Like stars, almost,  
But closer – so close you can almost feel the heat, the empathy –  
And yet untouchable, unknowable,  
(Although you claim to know them)  
And knowledge, pretend or no, is saintly,  
A burden you bear that feels heaviest in the presence of  
Burning buildings.  
It keeps you glued to your spot there in your hilltop bastion,  
With stained glass windows for eyes,  
Unable to move or give substance to your cries for  
Rain! Water! Something to douse the flames that people are dying in!  
The act of arson itself dissolves into the night.  
What is past can hardly matter, right?  
Escaped villains aren't relevant to your worldview  
Of balances and scales (always wildly uneven),  
Even if they keep destroying things.  
The real guilt lies with those whose barns are intact and unburning.  
How can they sleep through the crackling flames?  
How can the smoke not choke their snores?  
Flames spread because of the plenty of ignorants,  
Whose whole, untarnished barn roofs breed bigotry.  
They are convenient and lucky, the silent sleepers,  
No need to look further than their dozing, warmongering eyelids,  
Their unjust, unfurrowed brows.

## **Cave Dwellers**

In the darkness,  
Under creaky wooden stairs that descend  
Into a musty, lightless cellar,  
Silent spiders crawl and hide in their  
Nefarious, silk-spun, serpentine homes.  
The supple strings glisten in shreds of moonlight  
That have crept in through cracks between  
Cold, ageless stones.

In the darkness,  
Shadows huddle together,  
Their cold, shivering shoulders touching  
As they crouch, crowded in circles,  
Providing a shady shelter  
For the nearly forgotten (but never unfelt)  
Boxes of rusty blades and blood-stained parchment.

In the darkness,  
Silent winds stir the edges  
Of tattered woolen blankets thrown carelessly over  
Broken chairs and splintered doors.  
The mites bore cold homes within  
And bite the soft fingers that find them.  
And the grain of the wood remembers  
Its former graceful frame,  
The looming, spindly limbs from whence it came,  
But can't recall when it stopped growing.

In the darkness,  
Breathing is labored, and labors  
Disappear into forgotten shades of blue and black.  
The many echoed voices whisper from above the  
Rotting panels of ceiling and floor,  
And all they ask for now is blood,  
Blood that was spilt a long time ago  
For no one but the hungry priest who breeds desire  
And feeds ego in this crowded pit,  
Where repentance buys you little but  
Your own shimmering skin.

In the darkness,  
Lives a monster whose hideous face  
Has blinded many glowing eyes before.  
Best to leave them closed, or close  
The door before you go.  
This underground cavity is not meant for the  
Meek or weary,  
But yearns for the pale, raw cheeks of those  
Who've waited under heavy metal while they grow out



Their new flesh.

In the darkness,  
The scaly, eight-legged creature pulls out its sharp claws  
One by one,  
Its insides, now opened to the void,  
Spill out on the blackened floor,  
And there, in the glistening puddles,  
Even as the shadows vibrate and quiver in the night,  
Lies proof of light.