

## **Nothing was Wrong**

I will wrap hands around you, from the edges of my frayed jaw to your hair. Your thistle skin pressed thin through the dark creases in my fingers.

The first time I held you, I jerked awake and saw that you were the Oklahoma morning air, and oatmeal with my mother, and I knew I'd come full circle. Now, my word hands will fold the world, push my humidity next to your Mexico dust.

I want in increasing desperation. No one will ever come after me to grow, but you chose to. It's time to learn why, with my teeth, with the calluses on my palms.

Boy who was me, I have found a way to fold lightning into my palms and pass it away, trigger shuddering waves, so stop climbing around in your bed.

I still remember the day I flung a belt around my neck, stared at the blood flecked walls, long dried, tried too hard. Amante, restore me to health, please, restore me to health with your legs. I'm going crazy in this room. The lights are inside of my skin now.

I want to drop my sails into a heartbeat ripple. I am the waves which are pushed along your legs. Amante, you are mine. You were mine the day you picked strawberries on hands and knees and I wanted to bury fingers into your veins.

There, nothing was wrong. Before the chemicals coursing through me reached their final peak and before I was coated in red berry juice, penitent, you were angles and lines.

You pushed your tongue into my spine and told me I wanted an ocean. It was the most control I could give you. I want you to have more. Amante, I want you to be a part of me. I am the waves pushing up your legs into mine, in heat desperation, in heat lightning, crackling.

## **Because I swear this isn't a love poem**

Kathleen, when I kissed you on the bridge in Mystic on a Friday night, you were wearing a red jacket and it was the same color as your hair and all I wanted to do in that moment was marry you. Or hold you. Or fuck you. Maybe all of those things.

You wore red  
and I wore black and we both matched our hair,  
and the girl who served you hot chocolate said we were  
cute together, or she ignored us, or we all burst into song,  
I don't know.

Kathleen, I have to wonder if you had your eyes on anything except the joints  
and angles of my chest.

We showered together and you didn't know what to do with your hands.  
Lying in your bed I asked you questions, all of which came down  
to fear. You listed my flaws but forgot to say that I'm bad at dancing.

I rode away in a train. I went home, Kat.  
With one foot between the second and third yellow-painted metal steps  
up into the coach car, my breath held my throat and needles  
filled the chest that your fingers traced, relentlessly,  
and for more than a moment I stood with one brown shoe  
on metal, one foot lifted, the cold steel filling my hands,  
contrite, with hope that went on forever, but you were not a part of the hope,  
the hope was only for my home, that I would pull it to me with  
cold steel and in that rushing brightness  
finally realize why I wanted so badly to make you mine  
and be rid of you at the same time.  
Do you see how that could go on forever?

There are two men in me,  
two men the way you are two women,  
the way the dawn is a beginning and a darkness,  
and both of me loved both of you like a toss of a quarter,  
spinning.

## **For Children Of The Hurricane**

a pecha kucha

### **Prophecy**

I dreamed my sister had been buried with full military honors, leaving in the morning and coming back in a box. In the funeral, I carried her coffin myself, down the main street of my town, and sure enough, the bones of my knees broke through the skin and fell to the pavement and I could only crawl.

### **Opening Scene**

The boy is sitting on the back porch when his father kills himself with a shotgun in the kitchen. The first winds of a September hurricane shake their fence. In the house, the oven timer goes off and blares and blares and the boy lets the house burn down.

### **How Fiction Functions**

Fiction functions by misdirecting. Fiction doesn't know any more than you do, it's just along for the ride, it promises. But it doesn't like to admit it has no idea what it's doing. It shows you the way light fills a room, and discovers the contents of that room with you.

### **Scene With A Grave**

I am considering writing the story of what happens after Death comes to visit the son. He gains a name and changes it. He is put in foster care and shuffled throughout the state. He sits in a graveyard across the street from a foster house he'll soon leave and leans against a blank slate and when he looks up there is a man made of sticks and bone and buckshot heaving on the rock wall and he gives the son a new name.

### **Foreshadowing**

I keep thinking I will have a dream about sitting in a bar with my sister, both of us smoking. She will not talk about what dying is like and I will try and describe why my friend thinks smoke patterns have intimacy. He is more of a romantic than I am and this bothers her. I'll think about the way smoke streams back from a train entering a tunnel and she will finish her drink and disappear on the way to the bathroom.

### **Dramatic Arc**

The son will desire at first, revenge. Then he will desire a way to fix the problems he has caused. His story will be part mystery, part time bending saga, and part elegy. What changes him when the story begins will be, at first, more important than what changes him before the end.

### **Imagery**

Sex will never be described in anything approaching proper detail. The stick and bone man will not stand for it; the sound of a train's whistle will be all the climax that is need, the sound of a bird smacking into pavement, the sound of wood splintering. What is fiction for except to remake the things we already know?

### **Opening Dialogue**

The apartment will be small, and the two small chairs at the wooden kitchen table will have their legs cracked. A boy will sit opposite a girl and she will sigh the way my mother sighs.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost,” she will say. The boy will be staring at one. “Have you slept? Have you slept? Are you sleeping?”

### **Symbolism**

However else fiction functions, it covers you like the first breeze of autumn. The cracked chairs, the pavement, the dry skin on the back of a hand have something to say. There is nothing like an uneventful moment. There is never nothing new to say, in a novel.

### **Flashback**

I’m thinking of a sister and a brother in a hallway with the lights turned off. They need to walk to the end. Their hands are clasped tight. When they reach the end of the hallway, the sister will die, but they do not know this yet. Throughout the story the audience will be shown versions of what is at the end of the hallway.

### **Point Of View**

The brother will fall in love with the son, who has been given the name Condor and will have wings tattooed on his arms. The brother will be confused when Condor says he talks to the sister. I will not describe what he means because I will want you to think he is insane.

### **Setting That Illuminates Character**

When I think of pavement I remember when our street was re-paved and it crumbled when stepped on. Like brownie mix, my sister would say, and pretend to eat it. I do not remember the names of the plants in my mother’s garden, only that their leaves would be withered and thin on cold mornings.

### **Connotation**

I wish I was not the kind of man who can never finish what he starts.  
Before she was diagnosed with her disease,  
my sister lost nearly a hundred pounds. At the funeral  
I will think of her being buried under the weight of our family.

### **Redacted**

You’ll find sweat in the eyes of anyone who kneels too long on hot pavement. I should say what happened to my father when he was nine. His little brother pulled a pot of coffee down onto himself while my father was babysitting him and was scalded to death. Because I wasn’t there, there is no suitable place in this story for that scene.

### **Falling Action**

Years later the brother comes to Condor in his bed, his eyes coated over with grime and his throat cut open, bleeding hot pavement. Here, I am not going to say the brother means him harm. The father will step out of the shadows to join the brother and they will give Condor a choice and the audience will think he is a murderer.

**Metaphor**

Because I am a brother of the train car, call me Charcoal.  
When I dream, a funeral procession rides down my spine, carrying  
my memories, the weight that turns my sister into dirt, makes me  
scattered leaves. In my story Condor will live without his father,  
but it doesn't mean he will survive.

**Allusion To Theme**

It's all true and none of it is true. The funeral procession, the  
pavement that crumbles to chewed goo in our mouths. The confusion  
that is collected numbness. What I want to know is WHY. In fiction  
everyone's motives are hidden.

**Resolution**

It is the arcing shadows which I will write into Condor's mind  
when he moves into the bright morning kitchen and carefully wraps  
his father's dead body in a sheet and carries him away from the fire. Condor will sit  
down in his place and things will come to an end.  
I am trying to tell you a story of a brother and sister without crying.  
I promise that after this everything I write will be a lie.  
Instead of fiction, sister, I will offer an apology.

## **I come from a long line of men without fathers**

I am not the sort of man for whom a brick wall is an invitation.  
I caress myself in the dark and think of the way hair slopes at  
the peak of a shoulder. My gums taste

like rain and the pumice of dead apples.  
A girl once told me I fucked with the mechanical  
zeal of a pistoned machine, smooth and calibrated,  
with the delicacy of over and over.

I come from a long line  
of men trapped in hay mazes. We spit  
because laughing is the same feeling as alone.

My father is buried inside of his own head.  
We do not disturb his  
plot. He cannot press his fingers into anything.  
My fingers are coated  
in adhesive. My fingers are paint. We butchered  
a pig in our living room the night  
I turned thirteen. A crown

of holly atop his head, the pig  
sang benedictions as we ripped  
him apart and hung him with his own guts and stomach.  
Covered in pig blood and sweat,  
we were princely.

I come from a long line of reformed liars. We shred paper into our fingertips  
because it is our only soothsayer.  
We spit when we lie.  
I became the shepherd and murdered my flock in gears.  
We are the only witnesses,  
and yes, I come from  
a long line of sole witnesses.

The paneled cars come for us after midnight,  
the gun oil pigmen gleaming in the doorway.  
We wield moonbeams and fire hydrants.  
Nothing works.

I am addicted to PTSD, agoraphobia,  
coffee, cigarettes, sex, and the word that means being afraid  
of the spaces around a corner and in the corner  
of your eye. I held mirrors and dreamed of inevitability, of inexorable,  
of being dragged forward into waiting claws.  
Step carefully,  
I've left traps.

I've wanted to fuck just about everyone  
I've gotten my hands on. I come from a long line of thunderheads.  
They wait inside of me, shifting tesla coils,  
sparking and spiraling into each other.

I come from a long line of men who have no history.

There should be a word that encapsulates  
the terror and shame of the dead afternoon sun.  
I am rooted in a car, in sweat.  
I am skin and sweat  
and spiraling shivering soundless.

The summer I died, I woke every day at five  
and walked to the concrete lake,  
feeling the edges of myself on an edge.

I get so confused.

I come from a long line of dead men.  
All we can do well is tell  
stories. The pig hollow winks, red.  
I want to slide into it and nestle there,  
surround myself in blood and chocolate  
wrappers and the hum of a modem. We rise at dawn,  
different people.

I come from a long line of fathers and sons.  
We dress in suits and pray to the wolf  
moon and find ourselves Condors.  
Even he wore a mask.  
Fire is its own  
reward. Death waves inside of  
patience. We spit

into sinks, into the ocean. We spit blood and  
milk saliva, spit the dregs of coffee that cling to  
our teeth in the morning. We spit on ourselves and  
our enemies alike. We are our enemies. We are alike.

I come from a long line of men who believe  
the best confession is a plume of cloud breath. We teem  
across the ceilings of things, we  
who have walked along the walls of Thebes  
and Damascus  
and Baghdad  
and our badlands  
and our heads  
and shaken hands with the dead.

## **I come from a long line of stories**

My father joined the navy because  
he had nothing else and was drowning.  
He walked in sockfeet  
and shorts from one end of the  
country to another, quiet even then.  
He smoked and drank across the  
shenandoah valley until he reached  
seattle where he drove a car with buckets  
for seats that he bought for two hundred dollars.  
Failed at four different schools and shrugged.  
Found a way to get on doing something.

I come from a long line of stories I've been told over and over.  
How my mother lived in sicily on the side of a volcano  
and it erupted down the other side a year after  
she moved to England and grew up in the rain, doing gymnastics.  
She learned poise and rebellion  
when my father was signing his away for discipline.

We all betray our morals, spit on our ideals: that's the story I was never told.  
My mother stole a flag and a lobster and I told  
the story to a naked girl, her leg draped around me.  
I come from a long line of stories I've had to figure out for myself.  
How my father was beaten.  
How he was strong because he was told to chop wood when he was 10 and took a liking  
to the ash-charred swing of an axe.  
The way my mother's father would scream at night.

I come from a longer line of stories I've told myself.  
Full of stories, the way a tomato bursts at its seams  
or a tin can bulges when the contents are rotted out  
I've convinced myself I'm full of poison.  
We poisoned our garden one year.  
The deer were thick and we didn't have a dog  
and so we filled our garden with a sticky coating.  
It smelled like rancid peanut butter, and I bathe in it.

I've told myself a story of sanity, a revolving cylinder of  
pharmaceutical liberation. Welcome, young lover.  
You will exit knowing only lies and crying.  
I do not give away secrets.  
My eyes have been cut out and replaced by a blindfold.  
This is a story of clamor.



I can only think about sex.

I know this poem will be rippled across my legs,  
shoved into the marrow between my bones and  
crushed with the kind of heat an oven makes.

I dreamed of a giant with a beer in his hand,  
my friend, he crushed a man's skull with his massive hand,  
because in my dream we were drunk and younger men.  
I fought faceless, dark shapes to keep his back clear  
and woke hearing him bellow and roar,  
bear man,  
story in the dark of night and the dim burn  
of chemical lights and death.  
All of my memories are tinged orange.  
We keep ourselves inside of ourselves,  
keeping secrets again.  
I've done nothing but lie for years on end.

I told a story of a man whose son died, whose mother died, whose mother killed him,  
whose brothers died, who died in an unmarked grave that was his bedroom before a  
storm, of a boy who shivered in his room of a boy who loved in his room of sex, of sex as  
a weapon, of sex as a defense, of sex as a fraying. I've told myself the story of a hardwork-  
ing man who's dead, of a girl who died, of a bridge that was torched in the night, of a man  
who lived in fire and printed fire in waves across his skin of a man who lived by the con-  
tents of his mask and the tip of his hat

of the way light blazes through a face  
of pavement and blood  
of this blood  
of the blood in my hands  
of the men who tried to kill me  
of the way a scream fills your head of the scream of your head  
of the girl who slept with me because she was scared, of the women who've fucked me  
because they were curious, of the way hair can entangle and fingers can become claws,  
of the way anyone could be empty,  
like wind in the morning.