

UNRULY GHAZAL FOR MY MOTHER

The nuns that raised her are long dead, but I can see them,
checking each crib & rinsing each cupboard, I can see them,

in the ways her nails bleed from scrubbing too-hard & how she checks
each floorboard: are they rotting from the inside out? Yes, I can see them,

they open the mahogany church doors to find her, swaddled against the crisp
April, the violent California sky, she is motherless, & they ooze, I can see them,

whipping up a billowing sleeved frenzy over this lost child of Hollywood,
poor girl, poor girl, they screech out over the dried-up valley, I can see them,

their white-&-black heads bowing for scripture & weeping, circling
our dinner table, as we worry so rough we snap, I can see them,

their silhouettes falling tightly against my mother's door-frame,
shadows on her chest, wringing her into fetal position, I can see them,

the opposite of good, I don't know what that is, for all I am is wicked,
untouched by the benevolent hands they ring around her neck, I can see them,

& in all my wickedness, they see me, throw water on my back, their black & white arms
stretching to meet mine, our palms making trinities, pillared & teetering, I can see them,

seeping from my joints & wringing shadow puppets against mom's backache. The sun
blighting her eyes to gems. The nuns bow down, black circles in the light. I can see them.

she can't see them,

but she knows they're there, busting out her sternum, bellowing, bubbling,
a child-self wish to be mothered, to be loved, to be whole, to be here. I can see them.

I am with them. I puncture rosaries through my wrists, my mother's,
tie us close-knot, skin gemming as bright as nuns' habits, yes, we are with them,

we wear their skin like a glove, wash us clean, paint us lighted, blood dripping & scarlet-warm.
Yes, yes. Us. Here. Underneath white sun – dissectible – that clean, clean white, sharper

than teeth

17 / my mom was not my mom

She holds herself up
with a cigarette

blanket, burrowing
her Farrah Fawcett

in the crooked-
valley afternoon.

She is built
for a California Winter.

Bubblegum pom-poms
& gloss,

she washes her hands
in the heat

of parked cement
& hopes to marry rich:

A husband,
sweet & kind

& that's all.
She would lather

her body in lavender,
rinsed & perky,

& her children
would never be born,

& the mace
of widowship

wouldn't stain
her low-cut

t-shirts.

TODAY IS MOTHER'S DAY

& I am stalking a graveyard, where all my celebrations –
of trees, gnarling around a bird's nest / of gravestones / their
dusk hands reaching out to / interlock / one hand made of
golden, chartreuse, light / the other orange, sunset, shadow /
of birthdays & anniversaries / of the woman who died in 1998
with a name close to mine / are now held. An unlikely Mother's
Day venue, if one isn't a widow / or in the wake of one / when
a husband dies / as when a father dies / every holiday becomes
his / even the one for mothers / especially the one for mothers
/ Did you know that some graveyards have glossaries of the
birds that visit there? / The one I'm in now lists all the trees –
where they are / where they're from / what they love. Isn't that
wonderful? / Wych Elm / Black Locust / Cutleaf Full Moon
Maple / Snowdrift / Chokecherry / each one nurtured / named
/ & dated / as if a headstone. I remember some holidays we
would go to Dad's small name plate – he was cremated / not
buried / his name was carved / on a giant grey wall / in the
middle of / a dandelion field / so many other names / we would
fasten a small plastic tube / so small / only one forget-me-not
could fit inside / we traced our hands over the engraved letters
/ the smooth, cold slate / I didn't cry / I never can / but Mama
did. I haven't been to his name in years / but I often go to any

other cemetery / the Russian one with unreadable font &
headless cherubs / a giant Maple tree weeps at their bloodless
loss / I hang windchimes made of glass in her ample arms / the
military cemetery with perfect white blocks all in a row / no
trees there, but red-headed hummingbirds feed off the Bleeding
Hearts / the long single line of nameless crosses on the roadside
/ Spruce leave their pine carpet over the fading white paint /
the crosses smell fresh & heady in the rain / rain / rain makes
slate menacing / an impenetrable citadel wall / maybe it's that I
can't face the slate / his name shimmering black / or I'm afraid
it'll fall right on top of me / so that I couldn't breathe / the trees
wouldn't even be able to find me / though they have found me
now / in a graveyard with no name I recognize / & a catalog of
trees / I'm found / they've found me / to give me shelter /
asylum / enough time to celebrate the steadfast / for I'm sure
this day she walks along the Sitka Sound / towering Pines &
Sitka Spruce / out the other side / to the one graveyard I can't
bear / the one graveyard that actually matters / I can see her /
picking at her skin / smelling the salt of the sea / she covers his
name with her quaking hands / & breathes /
a prayer

I WANT TO BUILD A DIORAMA OF HOW SHE CRINKLES

her index finger, the garnished plastic of our coffee-
dining table growling back at her garlic

eyelids. They're grapefruit from crying too much. *Windex-
wipe that ray off your mug, im-material girl*. Ha, if only she had

the pea-strength to say anything at all. I wish she could say: *No-
Maybe: an I'm fine* that destined itself. I tried

to compose it. I drafted with crayon & smelly markers-
meticulously hoarded the ingredients, capital Titled them:

i. Sepia Portraits of Her Mother, ii. The Chest That Smells Like Her-
So Intricate, Ripe-Full Mahogany, iii. Swab of My Canker, iv. Her

Widow-ID, v. Dad's Slogan T-Shirt: A Little Drinking Town-
With a Fishing Problem, & vi. An Odd Rib Blob or Two. I took

a glass ball that swam below deck, smote the top hemisphere-
its edges ripped my arms off, so I used my brother's. Tossed

all the pickled-parts & pieces in, lilting *Fishin' In the Dark*. Drew an orb-
rattled the cauldron in fishing wire. Gathered the words I wanted

there to be a 3D-ness to her maggots. Real things can be ended-
I can ribbon them. Treated up larynx-tight. A ghost

didn't appear. God? Good one! She thought I believed-
but a tilted voice said *Dad is dead in the ground get over it, mom*

but stop. I can't keep ritualizing. Unclean me—
Is there a diorama to build dioramas? Fuck,

I need that. Magic-shit won't work. Too bad my plastic wings—
gold-sequin-angel, tipped me off, as a motherfucking fake. Ha,

if only I had the germ-strength to construct
anything—

THE EAGLE WE NAMED FOR YOU

— *For Mama, our boat, & the eagle.*

I imagine the boat caressed the eagle's quilled crown, oak
kiss on forehead as the wing clung to tanned boards,
creaking & cracking louder than the Charisma's green hull

as eagle bone hit that open maw of a fish freezer. My
mom found it, clutching the eagle skin-close to its
paneling, & she knew her call was answered in sick mockery—

Only a week after stark hospital beep & cloying starch bed sheets
an eagle was snatched out of the summer sunrise & only a week
after his funeral I saw the first snowfall, an ivory

finish cloaking the ways I don't remember
how his shadow tinted mine. But here's a small
connection for you: the way death mimics memory.

For shading my body is the starry hull of Dad's boat,
& I am six, & the eagles aren't magnetic, not yet, not now,
to the stainless-steel steering wheel, or the ray

on Dad's face as he becomes teacher, melding his
croaking hands into my peach-new ones, feather-
heavy, & I learn to hook young, bubbling salmon

squeaking laughter against the lingering tide— I imagine she had crept
onto the deck to begin a ceremony. Did she lay
Dad's favorite t-shirts in a circle? Did she call upon that power?

Bring him back, she'd implore, & she melded the Charisma's
paint-chip boards into a casket, a tomb, a creature
fit to electrify Dad's heart into beating, into creation, back

from the depths. Yes, her call was answered.

By an eagle streaking out of the sun, landing on the boat's
swollen hull. Another red-string connection, here, for I have

felt *my* feathers burn to ashes, a cremation, my ribs
rattling in their cages, as I poured Dad's ashes on this very
deck. I laughed here, once, with a shadow-father

stitched to my very skin. I imagine the contours of the tall,
pillared masts made my Mom's face camouflaged, hidden,
and I can't clearly see what she looked like— She ran, didn't she?

I imagine her, uncovering that eagle, the broken wing magnetic & mimicking
the curve of her arm, & she runs, loose feathers crowning her scalp, clear
as an angel & blonde as her childhood sun, she runs,

running, running, she's always, running, just look at her beat
back time, she's flying, & she's cradling the bird in her arms, as
body-mimic, of mine, my brother's, my sisters', I imagine

she limped into the summer air, barnacles from the
whimpering wood knocking at her ankles, grasping
that eagle as if it were Dad's heart, and she,

electricity.