

Finding Religion in Southern California

Doing life under your Amazon weighted blanket calls for an occasional recharging in ocean waves— whips of mercury to soothe round ligaments. Your unborn daughter swimming in a swimmer for a moment.

For a moment, your anemia weighs about as much as the EDD claim form that still makes no sense to you at thirty. You would much rather read your theories on starseeds, quantum entanglements, chart those futures given to you at The Psychic Eye. The closest thing to a compromise is investing in Boxabl pre IPO— Elon's \$50,000 foldout house, pre-empting that much discussed inhabitation of Mars.

You have the intent to write well as your trilingual son has the intent to speak: both of you made for these respective modes of articulation but predisposed to absorption. To gain not only a full picture, but the foundational squawks and scribbles, the *is* and *iotas* of connection. These processes should facilitate a necessary increase in vibration. *If we can somehow convince the brain that we already have what we want we will attract it instantly.*

I Walk into a Crime Scene

A Very Hungry Caterpillar torn to shreds by my two-year-old son. Pages dismembered of words where now lie but partial images of stone fruit, a rounding pupa. The only page left intact, which happens to be the very last, extends from the remains of the book's mangled spine— had I arrived a moment later it may have been too late to salvage Eric Carle's rendering of the beautiful butterfly. His father and I have explained to him many times that books are to be cherished, and though his trilingualism has delayed his speech, his receptive language indicates full range of comprehension *en trois langues!*

In French, the word for language also means tongue— all muscle, no bone, very supple, according to *Scientific American*. According to *Dateline NBC*, severing the lingual artery causes certain death. *Dateline*, a guilty pleasure of mine and my husband's, is never on when our son is in range of the television. He is not repeating behavior he has seen. So how

to account for a motive?

On crime shows, motive is everything: the indicator of our primary suspect, the explanation behind his methods, the determining factor of the crime's punishment. Was the murder an act of self-defense, or

does the aggressor have a history of killing animals as a child?

It always goes back to childhood; how much love was given by the mother, understanding by the father— how many chances did the child have to explain himself? As a first-time mom and a crime show aficionada I am acutely aware of this all: I snuggle my boy nightly, kiss his cheeks when he comes home, sing to him *Je t'aimerai toujours* (jusqu'à la saint-glinglin!) For a moment I wonder if there's something I've done wrong, or haven't been doing, though I am quickly reassured

when he approaches this last remaining page like a relic, brings it to me as the cat would a dead animal. Later I read that tearing books is a normal toddler behavior— a sensory pleasure, an indication of a growing interest in books.

Chrysalis

This body needs oceans, or more tending to.
A boy leaves an empty bottle on a nightstand—
 I see myself. I understand. What
a throat feels and says are two different things.
My throat feels containment but says *I*
 have chosen a life now. It's funny how close
containment lives to contentment, in sound and
in execution. A monarch is unveiling
 a roadmap, a woman watches
inside—*content.* All is nature, all is place— A word
felt in the throat. For what it is, it is and
is not. It can only thrive in stasis. It binds now,
as *occlusion*, or festers as a thought. These days
 it's hard to even know the difference.

Parsimony

When you hear hoofbeats think horses, not zebras

-Dr. Theodore Woodward

Evening's coral, and in perfect body

I carve a ghost out of wood.

The ghost might be a metaphor

As might be the wood.

I won't know until I carve this through.

I won't know until there thrives a word

For every fever of memory I hone.

Maybe that's the wood, the way we travel back,

Knife to retention. The way we'll make every shade

Of childhood glow until upended.

The glow might be the ghost, or

The light we shine through paper—

The paper, the memory. The memory, the word

In its original bloom.

I should include, somewhere, that I hate that word,

Bloom. It reminds me of the time a family acquaintance

Spoke of my womanhood like a thing sprouting from dirt.

Maybe it was. Maybe that's why so many poets

Write of slaughtering goats. The subject has never

Appealed to me, but dirty hands will do what they must

With words in such a carnal aftermath. I should also clarify

That no one I knew had a thing to do with my body.

The way it is now, more construct than instrument, is

Anybody's fault. Could that be the ghost? It would explain

The temperature, the feral nature of the static, the fact that only my

Little boy can see it. Anyone who's been through this will tell you

It's a new way of communion. It's the body fueling the dirt. That it never

Really mattered what was ghost or what was wood: the thermodynamics between

Them told us everything we needed. We're the ones who laid it all to rest.

True, Truer, Truest

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.”

— Carl Jung

I.

I fear this daughter will break the worst out of me.

I fear there is too little to say about the act of separation.

I know I am using language wrong when the words
sober me up.

I am extra fucked when tempted to write about flowers.

I could write about last summer, but it would anger too many,
and I have not yet mastered the art of resilience.

What's left isn't liminal enough.

What's left is an old shoe made a relic.

What's left is a presage of early morning wake ups and sensory displacement,
your love of an automated coffee dispenser.

II.

I tremble, the hallway trembles.

Boots on the ground are not exactly boots, but same attitude.

My figure skater body is too small for my head, but no time
to feel that now.

We are always a part of some day— I think of the pie charts used
to teach fractions.

I think of a lifetime as a circle, though it resembles a squiggle
upon closer inspection.

I play this kicking game with my brother. We pad
our feet gently— innocent.

I discover my love of teaching. He discovers the gate left open at recess.

My mother loves the French. She has a print of John Lennon's *Imagine*. At the end
of a day, or apex of a squiggle, a single glass of Charles Shaw.

When I start college I feel it as feedback. Pitch
too high for the ears.

I'll feel it again ten years from now, when asked
Doesn't the child come first?

Now a boy runs in dinosaur pajamas. Soon I will welcome a daughter.

No nightly glass to mute a thing.

I will feel every kick, both hers and mine.

III.

You wanted to be like her, so they filled yours up with saline— a simple

salt solution.

You still hate yourself for letting her be the one to tell your parents.

You love them all, even though a sick world tries to convince us daily that *family is the root cause*.

Sometimes it is.

Sometimes, the world befriends you twice, then sends you into a hungry armchair.

You find it funny,

this hunch for honesty,

when inside you'd lie yourself sideways—

which is the only way they'll let you lie when you are pregnant, something to do with the vena cava.

Does that mean more of us lie now, the rigidity of our fetal shape

a constant levering

of our traumas and what we will do with our traumas?

Somewhere in this we will find our joy, and though I am skeptical I remember

that even the prayer hand reaches its apex at the middle finger.

Even our toughest bouts of grief can be broken

into c-spined

segments of

laughter

when we observe the day that couldn't get worse but did.

Together we flipped off our sister

the day she died,

called it a prayer¹.

Now it's the armchair that gets most of my prayer words,

or my husband in the foldout bed.

How many lives can shape a lifetime while keeping the roots intact I wonder

while holding my stomach, my unborn child already kicking proof that she
will be like the daughters we discussed

in our childhood pool; me on the boogie board, my sister pulling me into aquatic figure eights
by the leash.

¹ This line, as well as the poem's overall form, was inspired by Ocean Vuong's, "Not Even This".